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DEAD-SHOT RALPH'S Ten-Strike;

OR,

Marlo, the Gold Ghouls' Chief.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE LIFE.

Two men were riding over the plains of California in the early dawn of day.

Both were striking-looking men, tall, well-formed and with handsome faces as far as the perfection of features was concerned.

One was dressed in the garb of a Mexican

BUT THERE WAS ONE MAN WHO DID NOT GO OVER, THOUGH HIS HORSE DID.

priest, except that he had a belt of arms buckled around his waist.

His face was dark, his eyes expressive and he had a fearless look that amounted to recklessness.

His companion, riding close to his side, was attired as a well-to-do rancher, and was unarmed.

In fact, his hands were manacled and bound to the forward horn of his saddle.

His face was very pale, and his eyes moved uneasily about.

"You intend to give me up to these cowboys of Senor Samos, do you?" asked the prisoner in a tone of anxiety as they drew nearer to the group of cabins.

"I certainly do."

"They will hang me."

"That will be your misfortune, not my fault."

"Will you not name your price and let me go free?"

"You are not able to pay it."

"I might be."

"No, for I wish you dead and out of my way, and I can get more by your death than I can by allowing you to live, for alive you would be a dangerous man on my track."

"You are afraid of me then?"

"Yes."

"You acknowledge yourself a coward?"

"Where you are concerned, yes, Fuentes, for you would strike at my back."

"How can my death serve you?"

"Just this way: I'll wed the fair Senorita Lulita."

"Bah!"

"It is true, for I love her, loved her when I saw you kidnap her in the old ruin, where I, an unfortunate wrecked mariner, had taken refuge when I was searching for some ranch to get food and shelter."

"I heard all you told her—how, although considered a ranchero, you were the secret leader of the band of outlaws known as the Gold Ghouls, and would force her to wed you if she refused."

"Unarmed though I was, I struck you from your horse with a stone, and, with her, escaped from your men."

"Her father treated me royally, but as she dared not tell him who her kidnapper was, I, disguised as a padre, went to your house, got all of your secret life by what I saw and heard, and made you a prisoner."

"I shall deliver you within ten minutes to the cowboys of the Samos Hacienda and tell them that Ranchero Marco Fuentes recently an outlaw leader, chief of the Gold Ghouls, is the one who kidnapped the Senorita Lulita Samos, the beautiful daughter of their employer."

"I shall suggest that they send you to the proper authorities, but hint that it will be just as well to lose you—lose you, you understand—upon the way thither. See?"

"Yes, I see that you mean they shall kill me."

"Exactly."

"And who are you, and why do you hate me so?"

"I am a poor wrecked sailor, whose yacht was struck by lightning and dashed ashore, I being the sole survivor."

"I do not hate you, but you are in my way. I fear you and so you must die."

"Your ranch I wish to purchase of you, for I will step into your shoes, and as you will have no need of gold where you are going—in fact cannot take it along with you—I will pay the money for your ranch to any one whom you may designate."

"I can do no more than sell it to you upon such terms, I suppose."

"Whom shall I pay the money to?"

"There is a woman, Elfrida Lamar in Santa Fe, that I wish you to pay the money to, and give her a letter which I suppose I will be allowed to write to her?"

"Oh yes; I'll pay her the money, never fear, and give her the letter, too."

They had now reached the edge of the timber, and the cabins, a dozen in number, were before them.

A score of men were visible coming out of the cabins, and all regarded the two men attentively as they approached.

Riding up to the chief of the cowboys the pretended padre said:

"I am Senor Julius Marlowe, the guest of your employer, Senor Samos. I have here with me one who, though known as Senor Fuentes, a ranchero, is none other than the chief of the Gold Ghouls."

"The Senor Samos sent me with him to you to take him to the proper authorities for safe keeping, but my advice to you is that it would be well if he never reached the settlement."

"The chief of the Gold Ghouls? He shall die!" came the response of the cowboy chief, and the prisoner's face turned a shade whiter.

CHAPTER II.

A LIFE FOR GOLD

THE prisoner in irons saw not one atom of mercy for him in the faces of the men about him.

He had come to the vicinity some time before, bought an old ruined hacienda, and was known as a ranchero for he had horses and cattle, with a few herders.

He had rescued the lovely daughter of a wealthy ranchero from an outlaw band known as the Gold Ghouls, and thus had sought to win the fair maiden, who refusing his love, he had kidnapped, and frankly confessed that his rescue was from his own men, and that he was the Gold Ghouls' leader.

She had been saved by the wrecked sailor who had passed the night in an old ruined Mission of the South California Coast and this same man, Julius Marlowe he called himself, had afterward cleverly entrapped her captor, and now was determined to get rid of him for reasons of his own.

Arriving at the cowboy camp, the prisoner had been given pen, ink and paper, and filled out his deed of sale to his captor, the money for the purchase of his ranch and cattle to be paid to one Elfrida Lamar, who dwelt in Santa Fe.

Bidding his prisoner farewell, with the expressed wish that "Heaven would have mercy upon his soul," Julius Marlowe went on his way back to the Samos hacienda to have breakfast with the Senor Samos and the lovely Lulita, after which he had in view the carrying out of a plot which will soon be made known.

In the mean time the prisoner had been given breakfast by his keepers, the cowboys, who held a consultation as to what should be done with him.

Some were in favor of not putting the State to expense to try and hang him, but to do the work themselves.

But, cooler heads won the day, and two men were selected to carry the prisoner to the nearest settlement where there was a constable, but to go on and report that he had tried to escape and had been killed.

This had the semblance at least of trying to carry out the law as far as lay in their power.

The two men who were to act as guards were secretly instructed to take the prisoner to the authorities, unless he attempted to escape.

So the start was made, the prisoner being tied to his saddle and the lariat of his horse placed in the hands of one of the men.

They had gone some miles upon their way when the outlaw ranchero said:

"Pards, I want to talk with you."

"Yas, cap'n, fire away, for we'll listen," said one.

"You have your orders regarding me?"

"We has."

"You are to take me to the constable at Dieago?"

"Them is our open orders."

"Well, that means that I'll be tried and hanged?"

"If you is tried, you'll be hanged."

"Well, I don't wish to die."

"More than likely."

"I wish to escape."

"Maybe you will be so reported."

"Well, you are not rich men, I take it?"

"We has only our pay as cowboys and what we picks up gambling, and we lose quite often."

"Then a few hundreds of dollars would go well with you."

"A few what?"

"Dollars."

"Where is they?"

"Well, I could get them for you."

"How?"

"Never mind how, but if you pledge yourself to let me escape I'll give you your money."

"And my pard?"

"I mean him, too."

"How much is your life worth?"

"We will say two hundred to each of you."

"Has you got more money?"

"Well, yes."

"It must be no use to you, if you hangs."

"No."

"Well, set the price higher."

"I will give you three hundred each."

"Any more?"

"Is not that enough?"

"Hardly."

"What do you ask?"

"Call it five hundred each."

"It will be every dollar I have, but I will have to go you."

"Now you are talking sense."

"Yes, I wish to do what is right by you."

"And we'll act square by you."

"That is right."

"Where is this money?"

"It is here, in a secret pocket, I have."

"We'll halt for dinner soon and then you count it out, but, mind you, no bogus money on us."

"No, indeed, for it is as good as can be made."

Soon after a halt was made and the prisoner's arms were set free, while the two men stood regarding him closely and with their revolvers covering him.

He took from an inner pocket a roll of bills and counted out one thousand dollars.

"That gives each of you five hundred, and, as you see, leaves me two hundred."

"Now I am to go free."

"Let me tell you something, pard."

"Well?"

"We had orders to lose you and save the county expense."

"We was to hang you and go on and tell the constable you tried to escape and we killed you."

"But our pards must think we kilt you, so we'll just dig a grave here, and put a cut rope over the limb of that tree, so as to show 'em whar you is buried."

"We must take your horse back, but we'll give you some food and then you are to light out—savvy?"

"I understand perfectly, but I dislike to go on foot."

"Better walk than lie in the grave."

"You are right," was the eager answer, and soon after the prisoner, with several day's food and a revolver and a serape set out upon his lone trail of escape, his life bought by gold.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAW RESCUER.

THE hacienda of Senor Samos was one of the largest and finest in the State of Cali-

foria, and had been built generations before.

There the senior lived with his only child, the Senorita Lulita, whose mother had been an American lady.

There were servants by the dozen and the herders, whose camp was a few miles distant, were numbered by the score.

Neighbors were few and far between and the Senor Fuentes, after his fraudulent rescue of the Senorita Lulita from his own outlaw band had been a welcome guest there.

But he had won large sums from the senior, for which he held notes, and at the time of the rescue of Lulita by the wrecked sailor, although she had a fortune in her own right, her father would have been ruined had the outlaw ranchero demanded his pay.

The second day after the taking of the prisoner to the cowboy camp, Senor Julius Marlowe, as the sailor called himself, was again a guest at the Samos Hacienda.

He told the Senor Samos how he had purchased the ranch of Fuentes, the outlaw ranchero, and would return to make his home there, but then duty called him to the northward.

The Senorita Lulita was a beautiful girl of eighteen, and had traveled much with her father.

Although the outlaw ranchero, though believed to be an honorable man, had made no impression on her heart, it was very evident that Julius Marlowe had deeply impressed her, and she bade him farewell with regret.

He started upon his journey northward mounted upon the splendid black horse he had taken from Fuentes at the time of his rescue of Lulita, and led a pack-animal well loaded with all to make him comfortable upon the way.

Claiming to be a plainsman he had declined a guide, so started upon his journey escorted by Senor Samos and Lulita, who were to go a few miles with him.

He said nothing to them of having to overtake a band of men ahead of him, but after farewells were spoken went on his way alone, and at a more rapid pace.

It was toward sunset when he came upon a camp by the side of the trail.

He saw there the tracks of three horses, and a fire that had burned out.

Then over the limb of a tree hung the end of a lariat.

One end was tied around the trunk of the tree, and the end over the limb showed that it had been cut by a sharp knife.

On the ground lay the severed end, and there was a slip-noose in it.

A short distance off was a new-made grave.

"Ah! this is surely the grave of Fuentes, so his guards did their work well.

"With Fuentes dead I will have nothing to fear now, and can wed the Senorita Lulita and get her fortune.

"But, then, I love Pearl Kenton.

"Bah! she is young yet, too young, and she shall be my bride later, when I have gotten rid of Lulita and her father in some way, but have their fortune, and can also get my worst foe Dead-Shot Ralph out of the way.

"The coasters think I am dead, that I was killed on my vessel, and I saw them, from my hiding-place, bury my dead crew.

"When cast ashore I found that old ruin, rescued the Senorita Lulita and then stepped into her regard and her father's, while I will get a large fortune, too.

"But, I need money just now, to let Senor Samos feel that I am what I represented myself to be, a wealthy yachtsman.

"I can get money on the northern trails, and with it my revenge.

"Those men I will soon overtake believe my story that I am the friend of their chief, and will readily follow my lead as captain,

"Well, Fuentes the outlaw ranchero lies in this grave, and I have stepped into his shoes, but with far better chance of success in the end.

And so musing to himself, as he stood at the head of the grave, Julius Marlowe mounted his horse and rode on his way.

It would have been far better for him had he looked into the grave and seen if it held the body of the man to whom he had, a couple of days before, so frankly confessed his fear of him.

But this he did not do, and he went on his way believing Fuentes the outlaw ranchero dead, and plotting for the future triumphs he had determined should be his.

That night, just at sunset he rode into a camp of fifteen men.

They were a wild-looking set, mostly of Mexican blood, and dressed as cowboys, while they were armed completely and mounted well!

They greeted the rescuer of Lulita Samos with a cheer and hailed him as the new chief of the outlaws known as the Gold Ghouls.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD GHOULS ON THE TRAIL.

"WELL, Sanchez, I am glad to have overtaken you," said Marlowe as he rode into the camp.

"And we are glad to see you, captain, for we feared you might have gotten into some trouble."

"No; all went well with me, Sanchez."

"Any more news of Chief Fuentes, senor?"

"No more than that he was hanged, and I saw his grave."

"I am sorry, senor, for we all liked the Senor Chief."

"Yes; he was a noble fellow; but now, Sanchez, tell the men to come near me and I will give them my plans, and I assure you you will all make far more gold out of my lead than you would had you remained in the lower country and had Senor Fuentes as chief."

"Yes, captain, for the trails did not pan out very well for us of late."

"Well, I shall neglect nothing, Sanchez, for I will keep the men upon the stage-trails, the wagon-trails, and raid settlements and ranches when I can.

"There is considerable wealth on the coast trails, and some ranches that I know well, and where we can get a good haul, only we must go by night. We will make money, Sanchez, never fear."

"All have confidence in you, senor," was the reply.

That night the men assembled around the camp-fire, and the new chief, a man unknown to them until two days before, said:

"Men, I told you that I would lead you to the Northern country, and would enrich you all.

"I know a secret retreat where we will defy attack, where none will dare follow us, and where, under your old name of the Gold Ghouls, we will sally forth to strike for our fortunes.

"There is a settlement upon the coast known as Point Desolation, and where dwell several hundreds who are both sailors and ranchmen.

"They have their homes on the coast, their vessels and are rich. They have their ranches back in the mountains half a day's journey and number their cattle by the thousands.

"The stage trails run not very far from the ranches of these people, and rich travelers often go in them from their homes to San Francisco and back.

"Government wagon trains, freighted with valuable supplies also pass along these trails, and in time we can enrich ourselves with the gold and booty we can get, while now and then we can run off herds of cattle from the

ranches of these coasters and sell them, and droves of horses as well.

"I shall demand of you implicit obedience to my orders, and going against my authority shall have death for the punishment, for we can only be successful by acknowledging one head.

"Now the man who does not agree to the laws that shall govern our outlaw band let him now speak or forever after hold his peace, for we wish no traitors in our midst, none who are not with us for life or death. Who speaks?"

Not a dissenting voice was heard, and the band seemed wholly satisfied with their new chief.

They believed that he had been the friend of Fuentes, little dreaming that he had been his destroyer.

Not knowing the truth the outlaws were glad to acknowledge one as their chief who pledged himself to enrich them, and bright and early the next morning followed his lead on to the retreat where they were to lie in wait to strike a blow for gold.

CHAPTER V.

THE COASTER CHIEF.

THE people of whom Julius Marlowe had spoken to his outlaw band, as Coaster Rancheros were indeed strange ones.

They dwelt upon a rugged point of land, had their fleet of little vessels in a protected harbor, were fishermen and traders along the coast, and inland had their ranches where they raised horses and cattle for the markets.

Suspicion had fallen upon them as leading a lawless life, of smuggling, and also of being outlaws ashore, but no proof had fallen upon them of guilt, except in the case of a wild young sailor by the name of Marlo, who had been jealously in love with the young daughter of the Coaster Chief, Karl Kenton, and who, when he saw the chance of having a rival, at once began to go to the bad.

He had sought his rival's life by unfair means, had turned his fleet little vessel into a smuggler, and had then been chased to his doom by that same one of whom he was so insanely jealous.

The chief's daughter was known as the Pearl of the Sea, and was a beautiful little maiden not yet fifteen when this story opens.

The chief, Captain Karl Kenton, was the acknowledged head of the settlement, and was obeyed implicitly.

His wife was as much beloved as he was, and Pearl was the idol of the strange people.

One night a vessel, a large barque, had been driven upon the reef off the Point, and had it not been for Pearl going out with a crew in her father's schooner, the Sea Pearl, all would have been lost.

Among those saved was a youth who had risked his life to carry a rope to the little schooner, and he remained at Point Desolation, adopted by Captain Karl Kenton and his wife as their son.

It was this youth who came to be known as Dead-Shot Ralph and who was the rival of the young man Marlo, but not one act had Ralph been guilty of to bring upon him the ill will of the Coaster Ranchmen, and so all sided against his rival—the hot-headed Marlo.

So matters stood—Marlo being considered dead, when Captain Karl Kenton went to his mountain home for a few months, accompanied by his wife and daughters, and with others of the settlers who had also gone to their ranches on the mountain range.

Dead-Shot Ralph had gone to San Francisco to purchase another vessel, in place of the one which Marlo had taken flight in and which was wrecked,—the captain and all were expecting him back daily.

The three Kentons were before their cabin home, enjoying the superb scene spread out

before them, and of which they never tired, when suddenly Pearl called out:

"Oh, papa! There comes Ralph!"

Pearl was swinging in a hammock, reading, when she discovered the coming of her adopted brother.

The young girl was daintily dressed in buckskin, bodice and short skirt, elaborately embroidered with beads and gold thread.

Leggings covered her limbs, and moccasins were upon her tiny feet.

A sombrero was taken from the ground and put upon her head in a jaunty way as she arose from the hammock, and in it was a large, crimson plume, pinned in with a pearl of large size and beauty.

A silver-mounted revolver was in the sash about her waist, and a rifle stood against a tree within reach.

Coming up the hill on horseback, and leading two well-laden pack-horses, was the youth whose life had been attempted by Marlo, the Coaster Renegade, and whose chase of his rival had driven him, as all believed, to his doom.

Upon Ralph's temple was the scar made by his enemy's bullet.

His dress was that of a sailor, except that he wore a silver-embroidered sombrero.

A rifle hung from his saddle-horn upon one side, a lasso upon the other, and although a sailor, he sat his horse like a Texan.

He waved his sombrero as he saw that his approach was discovered, and soon after dismounted before the door of the cabin.

Such was the Coaster Chief and his family at the time of the opening of this romance.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIMELY WARNING.

A MAN stood among a group of bowlders, and his look indicated one who was skulking, as though he expected some one, or was there for an evil purpose.

But, whatever his appearance might indicate, in this instance appearances were deceitful, for the man was there to meet one whom he had done a great service to.

But his manner was nervous, his face anxious.

He looked like a Mexican, and yet when he mused aloud his words were uttered in English free from all accent.

"Well, I did my share when I met Dead-Shot Ralph on the trail home and warned him."

"I well-nigh dropped him from my ambush before I recognized him, and glad am I that I knew him in time, for the chief gave me orders to kill and rob all who came by my post."

"I would not harm a hair of that boy's head for all the gold in California, for I have not forgotten how he saved my life that night in San Francisco, when the crowd would have hanged me for murder."

"I told him I was innocent and he believed me."

"He told the crowd it was better to let a guilty man escape and suffer what his conscience would make him feel, than to hang an innocent man."

"Then, when they would not heed him, he called to his crew, took me from the crowd to his vessel, and landed me far down the coast."

"And that is the one I so nearly shot down."

"But I acted right, for I told him I was one of the Gold Ghoul gang, and that they intended to attack his house, kill the Coaster Chief and run off with the girl."

"Now I am waiting to know the result, for he promised to meet me here."

"Ah! there he comes now."

As the man spoke, Ralph, the young Coaster Ranchero, came in sight, riding down the mountain.

"Well, Tony, I am glad to see you here,

and I wish to tell you that your timely warning saved us."

And dismounting the youth grasped the hand of the self-accused outlaw.

"I am awful glad, Master Ralph; but did you capture any of the men?" anxiously asked Tony.

"Not a soul, for it was a clean sweep."

"I'm mighty glad of that for my life wouldn't be worth a *peso* if they knew I had turned traitor."

"There are none to know it, Tony; but I frankly tell you had you not met me here on my way home and warned me, the result would have been terrible for us."

"We got the men of our vessels together and had some in the cabin and others scattered in groups, lying in ambush."

"The Gold Ghouls rode up to the cabin—"

"It was then I held back and dropped out, Master Ralph."

"I rode rapidly away to come here and await you in hiding."

"But I heard the firing and it told me the fight was a hot one."

"Yes, when they found that instead of surprising us they were in a trap, they fought hard and several of our men fell."

"The outlaws did not know about the cliff, and those who did not fall under our fire sought to escape and men and horses went over the precipice to destruction far below."

"Not one escaped."

"Then I can breathe free again."

"But the chief?"

"He went with the others, or was killed by our fire, though I was not able to pick him out in the fight."

"You would know him if you saw him, a tall man, fine looking, with a white plume in his sombrero."

"Ah! I saw such a man by the flashing of the revolvers."

"He went over the cliff with the others."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, there is a fringe of shrubbery along the cliff and they did not see it until too late and went over at a rush."

"I heard the horses and men strike the water far below, and the shrieks of some of them as they went down to their doom I will never forget."

"It was appalling, Tony."

"Yes, Master Ralph; but did you see the bodies below, for I wish I knew about the chief?"

"How?"

"Whether he was dead or alive?"

"He is dead, for there is a rocky torrent far below and they fell in that."

"Then that should be proof that they were killed."

"No man could go over that cliff and live, Tony."

"And the dead who did not go over the cliff?"

"There were six of them."

"None wounded?"

"Not one."

"And the chief was not among them?"

"There was no such man as you describe among them."

"Then I suppose I must believe that the chief is dead."

"But we of the band did not believe that he could be killed, for we all thought he had a charmed life."

"In the few months he has been our leader he has never been harmed, and though ambushed several times by soldiers and scouts he always escapes unhurt."

"But every man dies when his time comes, only we did not believe that Chief Marlo would die with his boots on."

"Chief Marlo?" cried the youth in a tone that startled Tony.

"Yes, Master Ralph, that was his name, Chief Marlo."

"Tony, I must know all that you can tell me about that man," said the youth earnestly.

CHAPTER VII.

BEYOND DOUBT.

THE man Tony was impressed by the earnest manner of Ralph, and after a moment asked:

"What can I tell you about the chief, Master Ralph?"

"He was a tall man, you say?"

"Yes."

"With broad shoulders?"

"Very broad and a fine form."

"What kind of a looking man was he?"

"A dashing fellow, and a face as handsome as a picture only he had a smile that was full of the Old Nick."

"Even teeth?"

"Yes, sir, and white as snow."

"What color of hair?"

"Black."

"Did you ever see him shoot a revolver?"

"Yes, and he was a dead shot."

"Had he a tenor-like voice?"

"No, sir, a deep voice, and one that rung like a trumpet."

"I see. Now tell me how long you have known him?"

"Some four months."

"Where did you meet him?"

"Away down the coast, sir."

"What were you then?"

"One of the Gold Ghouls, but under another chief."

"What became of the other chief?"

"He was captured and hanged."

"And how did you meet this second chief?"

"We were at our chief's ranch, for he was not known as an outlaw, and we went there as he had attempted to kidnap a young lady and expected an attack from her father, a wealthy ranchero living near."

"We were not attacked and were sent to our retreat, where we were recalled to the ranch and found Chief Marlo there."

"He was dressed as a padre, and said he was our chief's friend, and we had to mourn him as dead, for he had been hanged."

"He then told us that we were to meet him at a certain rendezvous and he would lead us to the north, to this neighborhood, where we would make our fortune raiding ranches, and holding up coaches and wagon-trains."

"We came here, or rather to the country some leagues below, and we have laid up a snug some of money, and what is more, Master Ralph, I know where it was hidden and we'll go and get it."

"It is booty that I would consider bad luck to touch, Tony."

"It don't belong to any one now, sir, as the Ghouls are all dead, excepting me, and I am the heir, you know."

"Well, you can take it, Tony, and I am very glad that you have determined to live a different life and join our people, for only Chief Kenton and his wife and daughter shall ever know that you were an outlaw."

"I never would have been one, Master Ralph, only hard luck fell upon me, after you aided me to escape, and I fell into the clutches of the Gold Ghouls and joined them to save my life."

"I believe you, Tony; but now tell me more about your chief, Marlo."

"Tell me just where you met him?"

"At our chief's ranch, a four days' ride from here, some twenty miles from the coast."

"I know the spot well, for just off that coast one of our vessels was wrecked."

"It was commanded by a young man of our people who had gone to the bad, becoming a smuggler."

"He lost his craft, and came to Point Desolation, then coming up here in the mountains with his crew, for he supposed he would be followed by Government officers."

"He came down by night, challenged me to fight a duel with him, and my second did not load my weapon."

"Here is where his bullet struck me, and I was left for dead."

"Chief Karl Kenton, the noble man who adopted me as his son, came here after him, but Marlo and his crew doubled on him, reached the coast, cut out the captain's schooner, which I was skipper of and fled."

"I pursued in the Idle Wings, and Captain Karl also came in chase."

"When in sight of Marlo, when near Bon Secours, we were caught in a terrible storm and his vessel was struck by lightning, caught on fire and was driven ashore and wrecked."

"I buried the crew the next day and supposed Marlo was among the dead; but what you tell me now proves that he escaped in some remarkable manner and reached the ranch of your chief."

"You think there was no mistake, Master Ralph?"

"No, for your description of your chief is the counterpart in all things of Marlo."

"Especially does it appear to be Marlo when we know that he planned an attack on our home, as you said, to kill Captain Karl and myself, kidnap my adopted sister, Pearl, and rob the cabin."

"Yes, there is no mistake, Tony; but come, you will go home with me now and see what Captain Karl says as to your chief being Marlo or not. Where is your home?"

"Yonder, Master Ralph," was the answer, and mounting, the two men set off for the mountain home of the Coaster Chief, while Ralph muttered:

"This time Marlo is dead beyond doubt."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTLAW'S TREASURE.

THE youth returned to the chief's cabin with Tony, and the latter appeared to feel considerably embarrassed at his position, as he knew that both Mrs. Kenton and Pearl knew all that he had been.

But the kindly manner of Captain Karl, and his earnest thanks for the services he had rendered them all, added to the very pleasant greeting of the mother and daughter, soon made Tony feel at home.

"I wish to make known to you, father Karl, just what I have heard from my friend Tony here about the chief of the Gold Ghouls, and see if I am not right in my surmise that he was no other than Marlo."

Even the chief started at these words of Ralph, and both Pearl and Mrs. Kenton turned pale, while the latter said:

"Tell us what you know, Ralph, to lead you to believe that the chief of the Gold Ghouls was Marlo?"

In a few words Ralph told just what Tony had said, and when he had finished, the coaster captain, his wife, and Pearl were convinced that the fugitive of Point Desolation had really turned outlaw, and had determined to avenge himself upon them all.

"Well, there is no doubt now as to his being dead," said Captain Karl.

"None, sir, for he rode over the cliff with the rest of his men in that mad fight," Ralph added.

"Did not Marlo know the cliff was there, Ralph?"

The question was asked by Pearl.

"Yes, for he has been here often, as you know."

"Then why did he ride to his death over the cliffs?"

"Well, he was cut off from retreat and knew what his fate would be if he was captured and recognized, so preferred death in the manner in which he met it."

"I do not believe that Marlo is dead," firmly said Pearl.

"Well I have not the slightest doubt of it now," Captain Karl remarked.

"I saw the men dash for the cliff and go over," Ralph said.

"I therefore am sure that he is dead."

"Yes, and I feel as you do now," said Mrs. Kenton.

"We can find out for ourselves, Master Ralph, if you will go with me," Tony remarked.

"I am ready, Tony, but where will we go?"

"To the retreat, sir, for if the chief is not dead he will go there and seek to get the treasure which belonged to all the band in common."

"Is it far from here, Tony?"

"We can camp there to-night, sir, and return to-morrow."

"All right, we will start at once."

So it was decided and soon after Ralph and Tony well mounted and prepared for a long ride, rode away from the cabin.

Tony led the way and they went at a brisk pace, readily following the trail of the marauders on their way to attack the Coaster Chief's ranch.

After some distance they came to a stream and from there on the trail had been covered up most skillfully.

But Tony knew the way well and they held on as rapidly as before, for the ex-outlaw had scouted all through the country here in search of victims and booty.

Straight into a canyon, the entrance to which was concealed by trees so as not to have its presence there suspected, rode Tony, Ralph following close at his heels.

Once through the underbrush they found themselves in a canyon that widened into a narrow but fertile vale.

A ride of a quarter of a mile brought them to a narrow pass, which was almost choked up by boulders which had split off from the cliffs upon either side and falling into the canyon had almost blocked the way.

Beyond was a basin as fertile as a garden, and a barrier of poles across the narrow pass prevented the straying of the cattle and horses which were there.

Several hundred cattle there were, and some sixty horses, all of them good ones.

"This was where a sentinel stood, for there is no other entrance to the canyon, Master Ralph, except by foot," said Tony.

"And there is no human being here?"

"None, sir, unless the chief or one of the men escaped and is here; but I will soon know."

With this he rode his horse alongside of a rock in the shape of a square.

Standing upon his saddle-horn he drew himself upon the rock and instantly called down:

"The treasure is safe, sir, so that I am the only one left of the Gold Ghouls."

CHAPTER IX.

THE GOLD GHOULS' RETREAT.

THE voice of Tony rung out with joy as he called to Ralph that the treasure was safe.

Then he explained to the youth that the top of the rock was hollow, and stepping down into this space there was an opening like a cavern large enough to contain considerable booty in it.

The cavern had been the receptacle of the booty of the outlaws, which they held in common.

No one would suspect the rock of being hollow, and the receptacle was a secure and good hiding place.

Ralph did as Tony had done and drew himself up to the top of the rock, when his eyes fell upon the outlaw's treasure.

"Ah! there is no doubt now, for I know this belt," and he picked up a large leather belt which had been made for carrying gold and valuables about one's waist.

"You know that belt?" Master Ralph.

"Yes, it has the name of Marlo on it, marked with thread—see!"

"I do indeed, sir, and the chief put it here

with treasure in it, as his share for us all to divide, for he had no claim upon the common fund."

"Yes, Mother Kent made the belt for him, and he has in it a watch and chain I recognize as having belonged to one of his crew."

"Yes, Tony, your chief and Marlo were one and the same, there is now not the slightest doubt of that, though I felt sure of it before."

"Well, Master Ralph, what is to be done?"

"I suppose, as you said, Tony, you are the heir to those who were your fellows, for you are the last of the band, so pack up your treasures and we will take them back with us."

"But the cattle, Master Ralph, should be cared for."

"That is true."

"You might divide them among those of the ranchers who were in the fight against the Gold Ghouls."

"That is a good idea, Tony; but how are we to get them to our range?"

"It will take half a dozen men to get them there, Master Ralph, so I say that you had best return to the range and get what herders you need, while I remain here as a guard."

"The very thing, Tony. I will start back the first thing in the morning and the next afternoon we can get here."

"Yes, Master Ralph, and I'll have all ready to start, when you return," said Tony.

So the two went into camp for the night and after enjoying a good supper they wrapped themselves in their blankets and retired for the night.

Early the next morning Ralph started alone upon the back trail, and as he rode through the narrow pass, did not see a fierce pair of eyes glancing upon him.

Nor did he see a revolver twice raised and leveled at him as he drew near, was within a few feet of the hidden man and then passed on.

"No, I dare not miss, for that would bring sure death upon me," muttered the man in ambush, and he crouched down among the rocks and watched the youth ride on out of sight down the canyon.

And on went Ralph toward the range, arriving there late in the afternoon when he made known to Captain Karl the result of his trip to the retreat of the Gold Ghouls.

"We will start back early in the morning, for I will go with you, and we will take a dozen of the men with us," Captain Karl remarked, and after a moment added:

"Since you have found what you did in the outlaw camp, there is not a shadow of doubt but that Marlo escaped death at sea and turned road-agent."

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERY.

CAPTAIN KARL went with the force the next morning, that were to go to the retreat of the Gold Ghouls, and drive back the horses and cattle, which were to be turned loose with the herds of the coasters on the range.

Ralph found a good guide and they went rapidly on their way, turned into the stream and then into the canyon.

Up through the narrow pass they went to the camp of the outlaws where all of the Coaster Ranchmen drew rein.

And no wonder, for there lay poor Tony near the still burning camp-fire and in the very center of his forehead was a small wound.

"He is dead!" cried Ralph, springing from his horse.

"Yes, he has been shot through the head," the Coaster Chief said.

"And robbed—see!"

And Ralph pointed to where the belt of the dead man had been taken from his waist, while a ring had been cut from his finger and his watch and chain were gone.

"He was shot over the top of yonder rock, father Karl," said Ralph.

"Yes, and while he sat here by the fire."

"It was done last night."

"Without doubt."

"He was shot by one of the outlaw band."

"Why do you think so, Ralph?"

"Well, who else knew of this home of the outlaws, unless he was one of the band?"

"There was no one here when you came?"

"Not a soul, or at least, I saw no one."

"It must have been one of the Gold Ghouls then."

"There is no doubt, sir, in my mind, but that it was one of the outlaws."

"Then the whole band was not wiped out?"

"Tony said that the whole band went on the raid against the Coasters' ranches, sir."

"But some one must have escaped."

"If any one escaped that slaughter it was Marlo."

"Why do you think so, my son?" Captain Karl asked.

"He has escaped so often before, I begin to feel sure that he was not born to die except upon a gallows."

"He deserves the fate, Ralph."

"Indeed he does, sir."

A thorough search was now instituted for some clue to the assassin of the unfortunate Tony.

But all in vain, for nothing was found other than that the murderer had fired his fatal shot from the rocks and then robbed his victim.

The horse of the outlaw was there, but his saddle and bridle were gone, and Ralph noticed that a beautiful iron-gray which he had seen in the drove of horses the day before was no longer there.

Also a bay mare which he had observed was not to be found, and there was no chance of the animals' escaping from the valley with the narrow pass closed up with the barrier of poles as it had been.

"I will see if he knew where the treasure was hidden."

"Yes, Ralph, that will tell the story as to whether the man was one of the band or not."

Riding up alongside the large Treasure Rock Ralph stood up in his saddle and drew himself up on the top.

"There is little here. He has made a clean sweep, father Karl," said the youth as he dropped from the rock to the ground.

"And you are convinced that it was one of the outlaw band?"

"It could have been no other."

"And if so, where has he gone now?"

"He could only go away from here with all speed, trying to place as great a distance between him and this place as he could, supposing that his foes might come."

"But, if he was an outlaw why did he kill Tony?"

"He must have suspected him of being a traitor."

At last Ralph went off alone and after an hour's stay returned to report that he had found the trail of two horses leading out of the canyon and going northward.

The men had not been told of Tony's position with the outlaws, and when the youth said that he would follow the trail he readily found volunteers to accompany him.

"Three of us will go and perhaps we can overhaul the murderer," said Ralph, and they took fresh horses from the outlaws' drove and started at once, prepared for a trip of some days, if need be.

CHAPTER XI.

PEARL ON THE TRAIL.

THE body of poor Tony, who had started in so late to lead a better life, was buried in the canyon, and then Captain Karl set out upon his return to the range, driving the cattle and horses slowly ahead on the trail.

He had camped in the outlaws' retreat all night, starting at daybreak the following morning as he knew that he would have an all day's ride before him, as the cattle would go very slow.

But the men he had with him were all good herders and understood well how to drive cattle and horses, so that they went on their way smoothly.

It was just growing twilight when they reached their own cattle range and turned the herds in with their own, after which the Coaster Chief sought his own home.

"Why, where is Ralph, father?" asked Pearl, as she saw the Coaster Chief return home alone.

"He has gone off on a trail, my child, hoping to catch the murderer of that unfortunate man Tony, for when we returned to the retreat of the outlaws we found him lying there dead, a bullet in his forehead."

"This is terrible, Karl, and after what he did for us."

"Who could have done so foul a deed?" said Mrs. Kenton.

"Well, people believe that it was Marlo."

"But Marlo went to his death over the cliff."

"Yet some one of those midnight marauders escaped, and it is just as likely that Marlo was that one as any of his men."

"More likely, father, for he seems to get out of harm's way continually," Pearl remarked.

"But did Ralph go alone, father?"

"Oh, no, two of the men went with him."

"Do you really think he is in danger, father?"

"I would feel better if he had half a dozen men with him instead of two."

Pearl said no more then and soon after bade her parents good-night and went to her room.

The old couple also retired and were quickly fast asleep, little dreaming what Pearl was about.

That young miss had gone to her room, as has been said, but not to sleep.

She had speedily made her toilet for a ride, and sitting down at a table wrote a short note, which she left where it could be readily seen by any one coming into the room.

What she wrote was as follows:

"DEAR FATHER:—

"Do not feel angry with me, you and mother, but as you admitted that Ralph should have more men I have decided to follow on his trail with half a dozen brave fellows I go to the ranches to ask to go with me."

"I hope to overtake Ralph before he gets into any trouble, or if he has already done so to help him out of it."

"Look for me back soon and Ralph with me."

"Lovingly,

"PEARL."

"P. S. I shall carry pack-horses with plenty of provisions, and all to make myself comfortable so do not be distressed about me."

Such was Pearl's letter and after writing it she dropped a large bundle out of the window, leaped out herself and went to the stables where she saddled and bridled her own favorite horse and rode away along the range.

She visited half a dozen houses of the Coaster Ranchmen and not a single young man whose services she claimed for the expedition refused to go with her.

In fact they were all only too anxious to accompany the beautiful young girl, be the danger what it might.

So a couple of hours after bidding her parents good-night Pearl was at the head of half a dozen brave young cowboy trailers, well mounted, armed and equipped for a long journey, and with a couple of pack-horses in lead.

There were several along who had been with the Coaster Chief on his expedition with Ralph to the camp of the outlaws, so that, as Pearl requested it, they guided her to the retreat.

It was just before dawn when they arrived, and Pearl ordered all to go into camp for a couple of hours' rest, as she wished to see the place by daylight.

When the two hours had gone by, they had breakfast and then mounted and started upon the trail which Ralph had followed, and whose tracks made it doubly easy for the last trailers.

"We must push on, boys, for remember Ralph has a long start of us," said Pearl, and she set the pace for them to travel and it was a brisk one.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THREE TRAILERS.

RALPH was as good a trailer as he was a seaman.

He had taken the idea that the murderer of Tony would not expect pursuit, and so would not ride at a very rapid pace.

If not, he would, by pushing briskly along be very apt to overtake him.

There was the thought in his mind all the while that when he overtook the murderer he would find Marlo.

As Marlo had shown himself so persistent in his hatred of him, so merciless toward the Coaster Chief and his wife, and determined to get Pearl into his power, Ralph felt that he was a man who should be captured and an end put to his evil deeds if still alive, for there was no telling what he would not do.

So Ralph and his two companions pressed rapidly on, following the trail of the two horses.

They came to where he had camped the night before, and he appeared to have taken his comfort and been in no hurry.

The tracks of the two horses were there, and from the camp on they were more readily followed than before, owing to the nature of the ground.

As nightfall approached, the trail led around the base of a mountain, and busy following the tracks, they did not look above them, so failed to see a man watching them from a cliff over their heads.

Soon after, they went into camp for the night.

Not expecting any foes near, no watch was kept, and when the morning came, they discovered to their horror that their horses were gone.

They hastily went about looking for some trace of the animals but in vain.

The tracks showed that they had gone in different directions, and so it was decided that each man should follow his own horse, returning to the camp if he failed to find the animal within a given time.

Off they started, and Ralph came, within half-a-mile from the camp, to a stream where the trail entered and from there was lost.

He followed down the stream hoping to find where the horse had come out, and came upon one of his comrades ascending the bank, having tracked his horse to the same place.

The two compared notes, and decided to go up and down the stream for several miles and then meet in the camp.

Ralph went on past where the trail he had followed entered the stream, and there beheld his other companion coming toward him and following the banks.

He had tracked his horse also to the stream and lost the trail there.

Up the stream the two went for several miles, and then discovering no trace of where the horses had left the water, they decided to return to camp and hoped that their comrade had met with better success.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached the camp, and one glance was sufficient to show them that some one had been there in their absence.

Their saddles, bridles and blankets were gone, as were also their provisions.

All that they had were the weapons that they carried.

In a very unpleasant frame of mind they sat down to await the return of their companion, hoping against hope that he had been successful and found the horses.

But, just as darkness fell he was seen coming wearily along on foot.

He had the same story to tell, that he could find no trace of where the horses had left the stream, and when he knew that their camp had been robbed in their absence, it was a bitter blow to him.

Without food or blankets, they could only remain where they were during the night, passing the long hours as best they might.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN TIME OF NEED.

THE night passed away on leaden wings to the three dismounted, hungry men, with no blankets to keep off the chill night air.

They hardly slept through the night, and were glad when dawn came.

After a consultation it was decided that they would still press on the trail of the horses they had been following.

They had no breakfast to eat, and pressed on as rapidly as they could for several hours.

It was nearly noon when they came to the camp which had been such a misfortune to them, and Ralph had all that he could do to urge his two comrades to continue on their way.

With hunger, fatigue and suffering they were about willing to give up.

But he kept on until nightfall, and then the three once more sought what shelter and rest they could get.

When morning dawned Ralph found one of the men too ill to go on any further and the other was stubborn and indifferent.

In vain he urged, and then, as no game had crossed their way he said he would go out and try and get a shot at something that would appease their intense hunger.

He was just leaving camp when the sound of hoofs fell upon his ears, and in another moment a party of horsemen dashed into view.

No, one was a horsewoman, for at their head rode Pearl Kenton.

Another moment and they had drawn rein by the side of the half-starved men, two of whom were in despair over the misfortunes which had overtaken them.

Explanations soon followed, of why Pearl was there, and how it was that Ralph and his comrades were found in such a plight.

It was then decided to remain in camp for the rescued men to recuperate by rest and food, while there was a search instituted further for the murderer.

Having partaken of food Ralph said that he was fully able to go on to the place where they had lost their horses and given up the trail of the fugitive, and with six of the men and Pearl they did so.

But no trace of the missing horses could be found, and after picking up the trail of the fugitive and following for some distance it was completely lost.

"I wish we had come prepared to go on to the ranch which Tony said Marlo had come to and met the Gold Ghouls," said Ralph.

"Well, some time you may do so, Ralph, but I am sure if the man who escaped and killed Tony is Marlo he will keep away from the Coasters now, for he has lost his vessel, then the Sea Pearl and his crew, now his outlaw allies, and he surely will take warning, after his escapes from death, and know that fortune will turn against him."

So said Pearl, and whether she thought there was cause to fear Marlo further or not, she kept it to herself just then, for she could see that Ralph was in no condition to press the pursuit.

So back to the retreat of the outlaws they went, and Ralph made a thorough search of the place for his own satisfaction.

The Coaster Chief and his men had buried Tony, and the grave was a silent witness to the tragedy enacted there.

From the retreat they rode on to the range and the valleys where their horses and cattle pastured.

There was considerable anxiety felt by Captain Karl and his wife about Pearl, though they knew that she was in safe hands with the people who had gone with her.

There was great relief felt then when the party returned and rode up to the home of the Coaster Chief, though at a glance the haggard face of Ralph was noticed by both Captain Karl and his wife, and they knew that he had passed through some severe ordeal.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SURVIVOR.

THE Coaster Ranchers had been in deadly earnest when they attacked the Gold Ghouls on the night of their raid upon their chief's cabin.

They were determined to kill or capture all of them, and their plans had been well laid to carry out their purpose.

But the flight of the hemmed-in outlaws toward the cliffs had fairly startled them, for where they had expected them to surrender, the ranchers saw that they were rushing to certain death.

There was one man in the midst of the outlaws who had been readily picked out as leader.

He it was who had led the the retreat toward the cliff, or rather the wild flight.

If it was Marlo who was the leader it seemed strange that he should do this.

Not an outlaw, unless it was the chief, had the slightest suspicion of the dangers before them, and supposed that safety for themselves lay in flight.

So on they went in a wild stampede, though they rode abreast at an order of their chief.

To their eyes beyond the fringe of low bushes it seemed there was an open plain and not a fall of over a hundred feet.

Mounted as they were, in the short distance they had to ride they rapidly left their pursuers in their rear, and no shot followed them, though the coasters did follow as fast as they could on foot.

Before the flying outlaws was the row of bushes, and breaking through this, unmindful of danger, the next instant horses and riders went hurling down to their doom, while a cry of horror went up from their pursuers on foot.

But there was one man who did not go over, though his horse did.

It was the one who had been the leader of the outlaws.

He had slipped back of saddle over the haunches of his horse and grasped the bushes just as the animal went through and began to fall.

The impetus almost carried him over, but the bushes saved him, and for an instant he dropped to his knees as though weakened by his narrow escape, and clasped his hands upon his ears to shut out the wild shrieks of his comrades.

Soon he gained the woodland, where the

cliff turned, and he plunged forward among the rocks and trees in in desperate flight.

Down the ridge he went, across the valley, and up into the range beyond, until he at last fell utterly prostrated.

It was broad daylight when he awoke from the exhaustive slumber into which he had fallen.

His face was white, his eyes sunken, and he ached in every limb.

Taking a flask from his pocket, he took a drink of liquor.

This revived him, and he arose and walked away further into the mountain fastnesses.

After awhile, like a hunted stag, he sunk down among the rocks, feeling that he had found a safe hiding place.

Shaking his fist, he said savagely:

"I yet live, and I live for gold and revenge."

"I sent them all to their death; but it was in self-defense, for after my failure, after having been defeated in my plans and lost half my band, the others would have turned upon me and killed me."

"Well, it was a strategy on my part that panned out well indeed for me."

"But it was a close call, for I nearly went over the cliff myself."

"But who gave the warning of our coming?"

"I believe that accursed boy, Ralph Rollo, bears a charmed life, for I shot at him again and again without even wounding him, as I could discover."

"Well, I must hasten on to the retreat and get the booty there and a couple of good horses and escape until I can return prepared for another blow."

"Now I am the only survivor of my band, for I saw none of them wounded, for those shot were instantly killed."

"Yes, I alone survive the terrible night."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FUGITIVE OUTLAW.

THE man who had escaped with his life, as the reader has surmised, was Marlo the Smuggler.

Having decided to go to the retreat he set off at a brisk walk, skulking through the timber and not daring to follow the trails.

Before dawn he was once more on his way and at last turned into the canyon at the head of which was his retreat.

He had reached the narrow pass, where the barricade was to keep the cattle from straying, when he saw coming down the canyon a horseman.

It was just daylight, but he saw the form of a horse and rider.

In a flurry of haste he sprang to shelter among the rocks.

Crouching there he drew his revolver and rested it upon a rock.

The horseman went past within ten feet of him.

Who could he be?

As he drew nearer the man started.

He recognized the horseman.

There was his enemy, the one he most hated in the world, coming, within easy range of his revolver.

It was Ralph Rollo, the youth whom he had sought to put out of his way.

A look of fiendish hatred came over Marlo's face.

Now his enemy was in his power.

Then he saw that his hand was unsteady.

He had had no food for thirty-six hours, and his flask of liquor was empty.

Then it flashed through his mind that he had but one bullet in his revolver.

All others had been fired, and his other weapons had gone over the cliff with his horse.

"Still he had the daring to rest his revolver upon the rock and prepare to fire."

Nearer and nearer came Ralph the Coaster,

and his worst foe rested his revolver upon the rock to take a deadly aim.

All unconscious Ralph rode through the pass, while the nerve of the man failed him, for did his revolver not go off, did his aim fail to kill, he knew that his rival was his superior as a shot, possessed greater strength and his life would end then and there.

And so, all unconscious of danger Ralph went on his way, as has been seen, while Marlo, the sweat upon his brow, his hands in a tremor, dropped back almost prostrated.

"Want of food and all that I have gone through have unnerved me.

"Another time, yes, another time we will meet again and then I will strike for your heart, Ralph Rollo.

"Ha! what a fool I was!

"That boy is not here alone, and if I had killed him his comrades would have been upon me in an instant.

"Why, I have just saved my life because my hand was unsteady, for those devils of his would have made short work of me.

"My God! how my life has changed."

CHAPTER XVI.

STRATEGY.

THE fugitive outlaw appeared almost maddened by what he had passed through and in recalling his evil acts.

He laughed in a bitter, triumphant way and then bent his head upon his hands and went to sleep almost in an instant.

He slept but a short while, but it seemed to refresh him and he awoke in a calm mood.

"Ah! this will not do, to drop off to sleep and foes all about me, for Ralph never came here alone.

"How was it that he knew where our retreat was?

"He certainly came from there.

"Can there have been a traitor in our band?

"Ah! now I recall it, what became of the man Tony?

"The men said he was in the rear, when we rode up to the Coaster Chief's cabin, but I do not recall seeing him again.

"I certainly did not see him fall and he surely did not go over the cliff with the others.

"Can he have been the traitor?

"The more I think of it, and recall that I do not remember seeing Tony after we rode up the hill trail to the cabin, the more I am convinced that he was the traitor.

"Some one played me false, for they were prepared for an attack, and now I find Ralph Rollo in our secret retreat, and he was surely guided here.

"If he is alone, well and good; but I will go on to the retreat and know, for I can get there unseen."

So musing he glanced down the canyon and saw that Ralph had disappeared, and he could see for half a mile.

Then he came out from among the rocks and went along the edge of the cliffs, keeping out of sight in the bushes that grew there.

At last he reached the little basin-like valley where the outlaws had had their camp.

He crept up among the rocks and peered over.

He started at what he beheld and his face lighted up with a malignant smile.

Seated upon the ground within thirty feet of him, was Tony the traitor.

He had all the valuables from the hiding-place in the tall rock, and was going over them and placing them in packages easy to carry.

His saddle and bridle were near him, but he had turned his horse out to pasture with the others.

The camp was otherwise as the Gold Ghouls had left it when starting upon their ill-fated raid two nights before.

There were their tents, extra saddles and bridles, blankets hung upon ropes to air, and other things useful, all left with the firm expectation that the owners would soon return.

The sight of Tony there, with the outlaws' treasure before him, that Ralph Rollo had just ridden away, was proof positive to the outlaw chief that the man was indeed the traitor.

He felt that he could kill the traitor where he sat, yet hesitated to fire, not sure that his revolver would go off, and with Tony armed and he weakened by his long tramp and fasting, he was not so sure that he could get the better of him.

"I must take no chances," he muttered.

After a moment more of thought he decided upon his course.

He crept back from among the rocks, after satisfying himself that Tony had unbuckled his belt of arms and that they were lying beyond his reach.

Then he passed in around the rocks and cried:

"Thank Heaven, Tony, you are another who escaped death."

Tony sprang to his feet with a startled cry, and stepped toward his revolvers.

But he saw, as he supposed, that the outlaw chief did not suspect him, and he said quickly:

"Oh, chief! so you escaped too?"

"Yes, Tony, but I am more dead than alive, for I had to walk all the way here and am famished.

"Give me some food!"

Tony hastened to obey and got some of the breakfast which he and Ralph had left.

He quickly concealed the extra tin plate and cup, and with trembling fingers served his chief, while he said:

"I never had such a close call in my life, Captain Marlo, and had my horse not fallen dead from a bullet wound at the first fire I would never have escaped.

"Pretending to be dead I watched my chance and got away; taking my saddle and bridle with me," he added as he saw the chief glance at them.

"I got one of the coasters' horses and made my way here."

"Did you see any of the coasters?" asked Marlo as he ate ravenously.

"Not a soul I am glad to say, sir.

"I came here to get our traps together, for fear they might pursue us and find us here, and I was going to hide among the rocks and watch to see if any of our band got away.

"I am so glad you escaped, sir, I am indeed."

"I know that, Tony, and you may be sure of one thing, that we are all that are left," and the chief smiled blandly as he regarded his intended victim against whom he was playing the deepest strategy to save himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ASSASSIN.

THAT Tony was considerably unnerved by the unlooked-for appearance of his chief there was no doubt.

It was like an apparition coming to him from the grave.

He had aided Ralph to search the grounds about the Coaster Chief's cabin, and he felt sure that Marlo had gone over the cliff with the others.

When, as he believed, he saw that Marlo did not suspect him, he began to feel more at ease, and asked:

"How did you escape, sir?"

"I knew the cliff was there, so did not go over with the men; but I have a surprise for you."

"Yes, sir."

"Ralph, the Coaster, has found our retreat."

"No!" gasped Tony, in dismay.

"Yes; for I saw him coming out of the canyon as I entered it."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Ralph, the Coaster?"

"Yes."

"Why, how came he here?"

"I do not know, but suppose he found the way."

"I don't see how he could do that."

"Nor I, but he was here."

"Strange I did not see him."

"Maybe he did not come up this far."

"He could not have done so."

"He was alone."

"Alone?" and Tony was beginning to suffer agony in spite of the indifferent manner of his chief.

"Yes, alone."

Neither spoke then for full a minute, Marlo enjoying the terror of Tony, the latter suffering acute misery, for it began to dawn upon him that the chief suspected him of treachery.

At last Marlo asked, with a yawn:

"By the way, is not that the one who once saved your life in Frisco?"

"Yes, sir."

"I heard you telling the men about it."

"Yes, sir."

"He is the one I hate above all other living beings."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Or, rather, I did hate him."

"You do not now. I don't understand exactly, Captain Marlo."

"Well, after I have been avenged on a foe I let up on him."

"Avenged?" gasped Tony.

"Yes, for I shot him."

"Shot him?" and Tony turned livid and quivered all over.

"Of course."

"You killed him?" and Tony could not articulate above a whisper.

"Yes, I'll show you how he rode into my trap."

"Yes, sir."

"I am here, say."

"I see."

"And he was coming right along there where you are."

"Yes, chief."

"Now I took my revolver so, as you see, or I should say your revolver, for mine is empty."

"He saw you?"

"No, he did not expect death."

"You were in ambush then, sir?"

"Yes, and he came along as unsuspecting as you are this minute of dying."

"Yes."

"When he was about the same distance from me that you are, I knelt as I do now, rested my revolver on a rock, so, and—"

"Killed him?" and Tony was all in a terror.

He was seated about ten feet from Marlo, and his face was livid, his form trembling.

Did the chief suspect him or not?

He had probably cast aside his weapons and these the chief now had.

His revolver was in Marlo's hands, the muzzle covering him.

"You killed him?" repeated the frightened Tony.

"No, for I had but one shot in my revolver so I dared not risk it.

"I let him go by, but I knew that he had come from this spot, I knew that you had guided him here, so I came after the game I wanted and was sure of."

"I came to kill you, traitor."

"Mercy! Have mercy, Chief Marlo!" and Tony dropped upon his knees before the man he had betrayed.

"I have sworn never to show mercy to

man or woman, and you plead in vain, traitor."

The words were uttered in a cold, cruel voice, and Tony saw that the man would be as good as his word.

With a sudden fear, and hope of escape, he started to spring to his feet and fly for his life.

But the crack of the revolver, his own, came quickly and he dropped dead, the bullet burying itself in his forehead.

"Now to see if that one shot would have failed me," said the assassin, coolly, and Marlo, the Merciless, drew his own revolver, took deadly aim at the forehead of the dead man and drew trigger.

The weapon missed fire.

A grim smile swept over the face of the man, as he muttered:

"Not to have attempted to kill Ralph, the Coaster, was the narrowest escape of my life from death.

"I have close calls, indeed, and begin to think with my men that I bear a charmed life."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FUGITIVE STILL.

MARLO, the Merciless, for the reader has seen that he justly deserves the name, appeared well pleased with his work.

He stood gazing down at the dead man and smiling complacently as he contemplated what he had done.

But suddenly he started and an anxious look swept over his face.

"I am a fool to stand here and that boy at large.

"I did not find out whether he was alone or had comrades near.

"He may have gone back to the range, or he may have gone to bring his comrades to drive these cattle home.

"And in his absence that traitor intended to play him false also, secure the treasure and run away with it.

"I must not linger here, for I do not wish to be caught like a rat in a trap.

"First, I will pick out for myself two of the best horses in the drove."

This he did, and one was saddled and bridled, the other kept for a pack-horse.

He then got together the treasure and packed it on the led horse, along with some food he took from the stores of the band.

He also took a rifle from his own tent, some ammunition, and his own treasure from its hiding-place.

This took him over an hour, and he was about to mount when he saw that he had not robbed his victim of what valuables he possessed.

This was the work of a minute, and mounting his horse he rode away from the secret camp.

Out of the canyon he went, and once upon the southward trail he breathed more freely.

He did think of stampeding the horses and cattle, but not until he had gotten some distance on his way and he dared not return to do so.

The thought that he would be followed did not impress him, for he did not believe that there would be any knowledge of his going to the retreat and escape therefrom.

The idea was in his mind that Ralph believed him dead, and if he went back to the outlaws' retreat he would not connect him with the murder of Tony and the carrying off of the booty.

So it was that he felt little dread of being pursued, and consequently allowed his horse to go slowly along.

At one place the trail ran around the edge of a cliff, then wound up to the top of the ridge and so on its way.

He had decided to camp for a good rest, being in no hurry, and so left the trail and sought a camping-place on the summit of the cliff.

Staking his horses out, he had gone to the cliff and looked down the valley back on the trail he had come.

But one glance was sufficient to cause him to start and change color.

His eyes fell upon three horsemen, and he uttered an oath as he recognized the one in advance.

"Ralph Rollo, as I live!" he cried.

"That boy knows me as the Chief of the Gold Ghouls, through that traitor Tony, and he is certain of my escape and so is pursuing me.

"Surely there was no mistake about Tony being dead.

"My bullet could not have glanced on his head, as it did on Ralph Rollo's when I shot him the night of our duel, merely stunning him.

"No, Tony was dead, for he was cold when I robbed him an hour after.

"The boy is on my trail, that is sure, and what am I to do?

"If he was alone I would ask nothing more; but with two comrades I could not hope to kill all three even from ambush.

"Ah! they are going into camp for the night, and that will give me a chance, for little do they think my eyes are upon them."

CHAPTER XIX.

A PHANTOM.

WHAT Marlo had determined upon, to throw Ralph the Coaster and his two companions off his track, he set about accomplishing as soon as night came on.

He made his way down the mountain, and as soon as night fell slipped in and got one of the horses.

He led him to a stream some distance off, and leaving him standing in the water, fastened to an overhanging limb, he went after another, and the same thing was done with him, only he was not taken by the same trail.

The third horse was also taken there by a separate trail, and riding him down the stream, he took the other two in lead.

A distance of several miles he went, and then came out into a well-worn trail.

Here he fastened the horses, and climbing the mountain, went along the ridge back to his camp.

It was nearly dawn before he got there, and hastily mounting, he pressed on.

The way that he had to go mounted he was well aware was over twenty miles to where he had left the captured horses, though over the mountain on foot it was not one-fourth the distance.

He rode on leisurely after leaving his camp, well aware that on foot his foes would never overtake him.

He reached the place where he had left the three horses and to his surprise found them gone.

He tried to track them, but was unable to do so, for their trail ended in a stream.

"Some one has stolen them, but who?" he muttered, considerably angered over his loss.

At first he feared that Ralph might have tracked them, but this he soon discovered was next to impossible on foot, as the space could not have been covered without knowing the way over the mountains.

Fearful that whoever had stolen the horses might then be lying in ambush for him, he went on his way quickly, and did not halt until nightfall.

His slumbers were not disturbed and the next morning he resumed his way, knowing that his journey would end during the following night, as he intended to reach his ranch before dawn.

The day passed away, and he had not urged his horses, for he knew that he was drawing near the hacienda of Senor Samos

Night found him on the trail some score of miles from the Samos Hacienda, and he determined to press right on only with short halts, to the ranch which he had recovered through the death of Marco Fuentes, whom he had turned over to the cowboys to hang.

He knew that the trail he was on would lead him by the grave of the dead Fuentes, for he so regarded him, but that did not trouble him in the least, as he had taken life too often to regard his victims with horror.

At rest in their graves they had no terror for him.

It was an hour or two before midnight when he drew near the place where the grave was, and so indifferent was he that he decided to halt there for half an hour's rest for his horse, for he still had a twenty-mile jaunt to the ranch.

The moon was new but was yet above the horizon, and it shone upon the timber which sheltered the grave.

As he rode nearer the spot his horse suddenly halted with a loud, startled snort.

This caused him to quickly drop his revolver, gather his reins well in hand and look ahead of him.

What he saw caused a cry to break from his lips, one of fright and horror, for standing upon the grave of the outlaw chief was a tall form clad in white, and the moonlight falling full upon it revealed that it was either Fuentes the Gold Ghoul in life, or his ghost.

The outlaw was so appalled at the sight that he trembled violently and then, with a yell of horror, turned his horse about and fled, the led animal following as though also frightened.

For a mile the man did not draw rein, but coming to a branching trail turned into it and made his way by a wide detour toward his ranch.

He rode up to the hacienda walls, hid his bundles of booty, and then called loudly for Carlos.

An answer soon came, then the tall form of the keeper appeared, and the gate was opened for the master, who was given a welcome by the cowboy chief of the ranch.

CHAPTER XX.

HAUNTED.

"WELL, Carlos, how goes all on the ranch?"

"All goes well, Senor Marlowe, I am pleased to say."

"I am glad to hear that."

"I trust the senor's trip has been a pleasant one?"

"Well, yes, very, though every man I had was captured and killed."

"Great Heaven! senor, this is terrible."

"Yes, Carlos, for it left me without a man."

"Then I am glad to say, senor, that what I did will benefit you, for I found a band of Indian herders and put them to work on the ranch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"Indians?"

"They are, sir, and the best ropers I ever saw."

"I am glad to hear this."

"How many did you say?"

"A chief and twenty braves, senor."

"Just what I want, and glad am I that you picked them up."

"They said they were tired of their wild life and were on their way in search of herders on a ranch; but all were afraid of them, to whom they went, and I took them."

"Good!"

"Even Senor Samos let them go by."

"Ah! how is the Senor Samos?"

"Well, senor, when last I heard."

"And the Senorita Lulita?"

"She passed here two days ago, senor, with a cowboy escort, and looked as lovely as ever."

"Now, senor, let El Cinto give you some supper, for it is yet an hour before dawn."

"No, I will satisfy myself with some liquor and then retire for I am very tired, and do not call me until late."

"Yes, senor."

"Now take the horses to the stables, for I will look after myself."

While talking Carlos had opened the door of the wing which the chief occupied, and had lighted a lamp, and spread the bed.

"Now, dismissed by Marlo to look after the horses, he led them away."

As their hoof-falls died away in the distance Marlo slipped out of the hacienda, quickly went to the gate, unlocked it and took up the bundle of booty which he had hidden outside.

He carried it into his rooms and hid it away in a lock-closet, then unfastening a cupboard in the stone wall proceeded to help himself to some of the liquor laid up by the owner of the hacienda, Marco Fuentes.

He indulged in a drink to his satisfaction to steady his nerves, and throwing himself upon the bed, all dressed as he was, blew out his lamp, and sought slumber while the influence of the liquor was upon him.

He was still nervous about the white-robed form he had seen at the grove and feared to behold it in his sleep.

He did drop off into a seemingly quiet slumber, but became restless and in half an hour awoke.

He opened his eyes to behold a sight which filled him with the same degree of horror he had known when he approached the grove on the side of the trail.

What he beheld was the same white-robed form which he had seen at the grove.

Then it stood between himself and the morning light streaming in through the window.

The arms were folded upon the broad breast, the eyes were turned upon him and his attitude was that of stern reproach.

There was no mistaking that face and form.

It was Marco Fuentes, the Gold Ghoul Chief.

The prostrate man tried to rise, tried to fly from the room, to escape that dread presence, but in vain.

When he recovered consciousness, the sun was shining brightly in his windows.

He was wet with perspiration, and yet his flesh was cold and clammy.

"My God! what a nightmare of horror I had."

"I really believe I fainted in my sleep, I feel so strange."

"Right there it stood, and it seemed so real, so life-like."

"Great God! am I a haunted man, or was it but a nightmare, after all?"

So saying he sprung from his bed, seized the decanter of liquor and drank long and deep to regain his nerve.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GHOST OF THE HACIENDA.

WHEN Marlo arose from the bed upon which he had again thrown himself it was to find Carlos knocking at the door.

He let the man in and was told that it was noon, and El Cinto had a tempting breakfast prepared for him.

He entered the breakfast room, when he had made his toilet and asked Carlos in an off-hand sort of way:

"This is a very old hacienda, Carlos, is it not?"

"Yes, senor, it is a couple of hundred years old."

"It must be haunted, Carlos?"

"It is said to be, senor."

"Did you ever notice any strange sounds at night?"

"Time and again, senor, for only after I left you to put the horses up, I could have sworn that I saw the ghost of Senor Fuentes."

"You did?" gasped Marlo.

"Yes, senor, and I was that startled that I ran across the Plaza to my quarters."

"Well, the place looks like an old ghost haunt, and I am half sorry I bought it."

"No spirits will disturb you, senor, I hope."

"I trust not; but here comes El Cinto with my breakfast."

As Marlo spoke El Cinto entered.

She looked very handsome in her neat-fitting costume and saluted the ranchero most cordially, while he arose and offered her his hand.

"You appear happy, El Cinto."

"I have cause to be happy, senor, and I thank you."

"I trust the senor will remain at home some time now?"

"I do not exactly know how long, El Cinto."

"I put his quarters in perfect condition for him."

"Yes, I noticed that; but you did not see any ghosts, did you, while going over the old rookery?"

"Senor, I did not intend to speak of what I saw, for I did not even tell Carlos; but are you sure that the Senor Fuentes is dead?"

"Beyond all doubt."

"Who killed him?"

"The cowboys on the Samos Ranch."

"Then he should be dead."

"I have twice seen his grave, El Cinto."

"You have, senor?"

"Yes, he was hanged and buried near the spot."

"Well, senor, if the Senor Fuentes is dead, then I have seen his ghost."

"You?" shouted the outlaw in a tone that startled the woman.

"Yes, several times have I seen his ghost, Senor Marlowe."

"My God! can this be true?"

"It is as I tell you, senor."

"I told the senor that I had also seen the same apparition last night," said Carlos, who had heard all that had been said.

And then, in spite of the tempting breakfast brought him by the woman, Marlo arose from the table with the food untouched.

"Come, Carlos, we will ride over and see your red skin ropers," he said, as he passed his hand wearily across his forehead, while to himself he repeated several times:

"Haunted! I am a haunted man!"

"That was no nightmare, but reality."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RED-SKIN ROPERS.

THE truth was, Marlo did not feel well.

The defeat he had met with, his escape at the edge of the cliff, tramp and fast on the way to his stronghold, and all that followed, with the apparition at the grave of Fuentes, his nightmare and hearing what both Carlos and El Cinto had to say about the ghost of the hacienda, altogether came near shattering even his strong nerves.

He wanted to get out into the open air, the sunlight, and to take a rapid gallop.

So Carlos soon had their horses ready and they set off at a swift gallop, Marlo leading the pace, for the camp of the red-skin ropers.

It was a mile from the hacienda, on a hill in a clump of thick timber, and on the banks of a stream.

The Indian lariat-throwers had pitched their camp well and made themselves comfortable.

Having let the other herders of the ranch go, Carlos had left the care of the cattle to

the Indians, though he had been anxious at first, fearing that they would burn the hacienda, kill his wife and himself, load themselves with plunder and run off the cattle to the mountains.

But he soon began to feel that he could trust them, and was very proud to show his red-skin cowboys.

He led the way to their camp, and as the two approached they saw that the herders were doing their duty, for half of them were away with the cattle.

The chief was a muscular-looking young man who wore all the finery he could adorn himself with, and went fully armed.

He answered to the paradoxical name of Red Raven, and greeted the Senor Marlo with a few words of welcome, while he placed his hands to his lips, when Carlos said the master had come, and gave vent to three calls that would have made a locomotive engineer green with envy.

The call was answered by the immediate coming of the Indians in the camp, and by return notes in the distance from several different points.

It was not long before red-skin herders were seen coming at the full speed of their ponies straight for the stronghold.

Red Raven had sounded his note of alarm, and they were coming at the call with fight in their eyes.

As they drew up their horses Red Raven made them a sign and they all gathered around him and gave the senor a salute which pleased him greatly.

The salute was a waving of lariats around their heads and then tossing the coil at the feet of Marlo.

So pleased was Marlo with the red-skin ropers, whose favor he wished to gain, that he at once took off his belt of revolvers and knife, splendid weapons which had belonged to Fuentes, and gave them to Red Raven, while he drew from his pocket a number of gold pieces and handed one to each of the braves.

The yell they gave at this nearly burst the drums of his ears, and he was glad to get away for a talk with the young chief.

All he could learn from Red Raven was that the Indians were Utes who had decided to follow the calling of the white men and went in a body to get work.

They had found it, and were content, even though their pay was not of the largest.

The chief also gave the Senor Marlo to understand that they were fond of herding, but were ready for any other work, from scalp-taking to horse-stealing, raiding a ranch or robbing a coach.

"They are just what I want, Carlos, and I thank you for having the pluck to engage them."

"Still I wish you to have other herders near in case the red-skin ropers should leave, or I should need them on the trail."

"Yes, senor, I can get half a dozen good men in half a day," was the reply of Carlos.

Having seen the red-skin ropers, had a long ride, a good dinner and noticed that all was going well upon the ranch, Marlo made his best toilet, mounted his finest horse and set off for a visit to the Hacienda Samos.

He arrived just at sunset and beheld the Senor Samos and his beautiful daughter enjoying the balmy evening from the *casa*.

They recognized him and soon he was made welcome, Lulita blushing as he warmly pressed her hand.

"And where have you been this long time, Senor Marlowe?" asked Lulita.

"I have been to San Francisco, and from thence East, for I have come to love your beautiful California so much, senorita, that I sold out my interests there and shall make my home here for the future."

"I am glad to learn this, senor, for we always like to welcome good men to our country," said Senor Samos cordially, while Lulita looked the pleasure she felt, as the man,

villain that he was, had begun to hold a warm place in her regard.

Urged as he was to remain all night at the hacienda, Marlo accepted, and not until late the following afternoon did he start upon his return home.

"She loves me," he muttered complacently as he rode away, "but I must go slow and not alarm her."

"I can wait."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHASED BY A PHANTOM.

THE outlaw chief was in a good humor when he left the hacienda of Senor Samos.

He rode on at a canter, his fine horse seeming anxious to go, and was congratulating himself that he would reach his ranch soon after nightfall, when down went the splendid animal with a heavy fall.

The horse had trodden in a hidden hole, and the master had been thrown with stunning force.

At first Marlo thought some of his bones were broken, but after a thorough examination he discovered to his delight that he was mistaken, and after awhile the pain passed off.

Then he sought to catch his horse, but the animal, expecting punishment for his tumble, kept just ahead of his master and did not take the direct trail homeward.

After a long chase Marlo was about to give up in despair when the rein of the bridle caught on a bush and held the horse securely.

Quickly he mounted, and as it was now nearly dark, he spurred the horse savagely in punishment, and started home at a swift gallop.

It was all of ten miles to the hacienda and he did not care to be out upon the plains at night, for now, as darkness began to fall he felt a fear of once again seeing the ghost of Fuentes.

The moon lighted up the scene after the sun went down and Marlo drew his horse down to a slower pace, determined to yield no longer to his fears.

He was yet five miles from the hacienda when something coming up behind startled his horse, which gave a bound and started off at a run.

Nor did Marlo check him when he discovered just what it was.

Perhaps it would be better to say just what it appeared to be.

It was a white horse and a rider clad in snowy costume which floated off on either side like a shroud.

The moonlight revealed horse and rider and the teeth of Marlo chattered together as he recognized the form he had seen at the grave the night before.

"It is the ghost of Fuentes," he groaned and deep into the flanks of his horse sunk the spurs.

He turned in his saddle now, yelling like a madman and firing his revolver.

But in spite of his deadly aim his shots made no impression and the white steed remained in the same position, a score of lengths behind him.

Taking his knife the frightened man pricked his horse on the back and the tortured animal fairly flew along, while he snorted with rage and pain.

But all in vain, for there hung the phantom in the same place.

At last the white walls of the hacienda glimmered in the moonlight ahead, and a light was visible.

The place he had shunned, the man now welcomed as a haven of refuge.

At last he took courage and glanced behind him again.

The horse and rider had disappeared.

He nearly fell from the saddle in the revulsion of feeling, but mastering his feeling of faintness, he drew his horse down to a

canter and approached the gate slowly, while he gave a loud call for Carlos.

As he reached the gate, Carlos threw it open and he rode in.

"Carlos?"

"Yes, senor."

"Anything to communicate?"

"No news, other than that your supper will soon be ready."

"Well, light up for me."

"Yes, senor; but your horse does not seem to be well, senor—he is dripping with sweat."

"Yes, I rode back in a run."

"And his flanks are swelled and bleeding."

"Yes."

"He must be in a bad shape, senor, for he never needs the spur."

"He did to-night."

"But Carlos?"

"Yes, senor."

"Have you seen the ghost of Fuentes again?"

"Yes, senor, it crossed the Plaza last night."

"And I have seen it."

"You, senor?"

"Yes."

"Last night, senor?"

"No, to-night."

"On the prairie?"

"Yes, it chased me home, Carlos, I frankly confess, for though I would fly from no man, I do fear the supernatural."

Carlos looked frightened, and he, without being told, lighted another lamp.

Then he led the horse away, and El Cinto came in soon after with the master's supper.

The man ate it like one who did not know whether he wanted it or not, and then turned for comfort to the decanter and his pipe.

He drained the bottle and sunk to sleep, from which he was awakened by a severe blow as from an icy hand.

He sprang to his feet, the lamps were out, the moonlight was streaming into the room, and it revealed again the tall, white-clad form of Fuentes.

The fright was again more than he could stand, and he swooned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RED ROPERS ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN the outlaw came to he found the lamps lighted again, and examining the door it was locked as he had left it.

"Never will I again sleep in this haunted Inferno," he cried, savagely, and going out he crossed the Plaza and aroused Carlos.

It was after midnight and so he said:

"Carlos, mount your fleetest horse and start at once for those herders whom you said you could get here within half a day."

"Yes, senor."

"Ride with full speed, and be here by noon to-morrow."

"I will, senor, but have the red-skin ropers behaved ugly?"

"Oh, no, but I am determined to start on an expedition I have in view at once, and they are to accompany me."

"As you pass their camp send the chief Red Raven over to see me."

"I will, senor."

Carlos was off within fifteen minutes, and an hour after Red Raven rode up to the hacienda.

The wing was ablaze with lights, for the moon had set, and Marlo was walking up and down his room when the chief entered.

"You sent for me, chief?" he said, in good English.

"Yes, Red Raven, I wish to have a talk with you."

"I am ready, chief, to hear."

"Well, I have decided to take the trail to the northward to-morrow."

The Red Raven merely bowed his head.

"I have sent Carlos after some herders to take the place of your men, for I wish you all to go with me."

"Yes, chief."

"Carlos arranged to pay you thirty dollars in gold, per month, and your braves twenty each."

"Yes, chief."

"He gives you your food as well."

"But I will agree to pay you, to go with me on this trail, a hundred dollars a month, and your braves fifty each."

"Red Raven is glad."

"And your warriors?"

"Will all be glad, chief."

"I will find your provisions for you, too."

"In return you are to obey my orders, and when I make a raid you shall also share in certain booty."

"Red Raven is glad, chief, so glad."

"I did not expect to return there for some little time yet, but I have now decided to go at once."

"Red Raven and his men are ready now."

"Yes, but we will await the return of Carlos and the herders he has gone after, and then start at once."

"Yes, chief."

Marlo now looked at his watch and saw that it was yet an hour to daybreak.

He must find some way to keep the Indian there during the darkness until dawn, and so he told him they would get ready for the trip.

He called El Cinto up and told her what to prepare for them to take with them, then overhauled the armory which Fuentes had gathered together and told the chief to help himself to what he, or any of his braves might need.

The Red Raven appeared delighted at this, and helped himself most generously, putting all in a bundle to carry back to camp with him.

But not until the sun peeped over the eastern skies did Marlo allow the chief to take his leave.

Then, with the day's dawn he regained his nerve and threw himself down to rest.

El Cinto brought in a late breakfast for him, and at noon Carlos returned with four Mexican cowboys.

In the mean while all had been gotten ready for the journey, and the pack-horses, a dozen in number, were loaded with provisions, and the traps which Marlo had wished to take with him to make himself comfortable.

About two o'clock he bade farewell to Carlos and El Cinto, leaving them in charge again of the hacienda, and once more set out upon the trail.

He went by way of the Samos ranch, and while his red-skin ropers had made a *detour* of the hacienda to await him on the trail beyond, he went in to have supper with the senor and Lulita.

He found a cordial welcome, and Lulita looked really distressed when he said that a messenger had come to his home calling him to San Francisco, where he would be gone for an indefinite time.

He found his red-skin ropers awaiting him a couple of miles from the hacienda, encamped upon a stream.

Once in their midst, his courage revived, and he decided to take the trail that led by the grave of Fuentes.

He had an irresistible desire to see it, and without giving his reasons to Red Raven, rode on that trail.

It was just midnight when he reached there, and telling Red Raven that it was the grave of a very dear friend, the former owner of the ranch, he stopped and gazed upon it with strange feelings filling his heart and brain.

They rode on to go into camp several miles beyond.

That night the ghost of Fuentes did not

appear to the outlaw, and he began to hope that it would no longer haunt him.

The next morning they started again upon the trail, Marlo leading, the chief either by his side or following close upon the heels of his horse.

CHAPTER XXV.

DEAD-SHOT RALPH HEARS A STORY.

IT is now time to turn to the Coaster Ranchman after the attack of Marlo and his outlaw band upon them and the unsuccessful pursuit of the murderer of Tony, by Ralph and his comrades.

Captain Karl saw that his wife was nervous over the attack, and so he decided to return to Point Desolation where Marlo, if still alive, would not dare attack them.

So, after a few days' longer stay they packed up and started for the coast.

Dead-Shot Ralph now began to feel more and more impressed with the belief that Marlo was still alive.

From Tony, Ralph had learned all about Marlo's life at his ranch, and of Fuentes before him, and his reported end.

He had heard of the rescue of Senorita Lulita Samos by a wrecked sailor, whom, however, Tony and the other outlaws never knew to be Marlo, for the cunning outlaw captain had kept this secret to himself, always averring that Fuentes was his bosom friend.

As Tony had been among those who gave chase to Marlo and Lulita in their escape, he described the "wrecked mariner" to Ralph, and the latter felt sure that his old foe had been playing a double game clear through.

The youth, learning all that he had from Tony, had come to the conclusion that if yet alive, the hacienda home of Fuentes was the place to look for Marlo.

Ralph had determined to go there by water in the new vessel which had been purchased for the Coaster Chief, and which would be fully fitted up and ready in a week or ten days.

So the Coaster Ranchers went back to Point Desolation, and several days after their arrival there, Ralph sailed for San Francisco.

He made a pleasant run of it, and had his own trustworthy crew for the new schooner, which was a perfect beauty, and was to bear the name of the Sea Pearl.

The cabin was very large and handsomely fitted up, and having been a yacht, which Captain Yerger had heard of, it was a delightful vessel to take a cruise in.

While being fitted for her cruise, Captain Yerger, of the revenue cutter Rush, came to see Ralph, and asked him to come into the cabin with him, as he wished to have a talk with him.

"Now, Ralph, I wish to say a few things to you, and have you hear me through to the end.

"I believe you know something of my life, that I had all that wealth could buy as a young man, and was devoted to my father and sister, for that was all we had in our little family.

"One day I met the man you now call your adopted father, and whom you know as Karl Kenton.

"He won me from the first, as he did my sister, and in fact she learned to love him.

"We believed him to be a poor man, but that made no difference to us.

"At last ugly rumors got afloat regarding him, and a forgery followed which was traced to him.

"He disappeared and some time after my father's secretary was killed, but before he died he said that Kent Carleton was his murderer.

"At the same time my sister was supposed to be lost in a storm while out in a boat on the river.

"Not long since, when I went to Point Desolation to capture Marlo, the Cowboy

Smuggler, I found, in Karl Kenton's, really Kent Carleton's, wife, my sister, and I heard how they had hidden from the world.

"I also heard that Carleton had not been poor, but a rich man, that my father's private secretary had loved my sister, and that he was the half-brother of Carleton.

"He had wronged Kent as a boy, afterward as a man, and he it was who had placed the charge of forgery upon him.

"He had surprised Carleton and my sister talking together, had attacked his half-brother, and only to save his life had Kent Carleton killed him.

"Such is the story about them, and they will only remain at Point Desolation until I have given the proofs of Kent Carleton's innocence to the court and have his name cleared of the stain now upon it."

"I hope it will be soon, sir, for he is one of the noblest men I ever knew, and I have often felt that there was a stain upon his life, but not of his making," said Ralph.

"Well, all will pass away soon, the clouds will no longer cast a shadow upon him.

"But, now to yourself."

"To me, sir?" asked Ralph with surprise.

"Yes, for I have made a special application to the President to appoint you as a naval cadet at large, so that you can enter the Navy of the United States and win a name and fame for yourself."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you."

"But I find that there is an obstacle in the way."

"An obstacle, sir?" and the expression of Ralph fell below zero.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN HEIR TO NAME AND TITLE.

"DON'T look so blue, Ralph, for though you may have to give up your cadetship at the Naval Academy you may gain far more in the end," said Captain Yerger, as he saw Ralph's face change at the sudden thought of losing what he had hoped to obtain.

"I would prefer a cadetship in the navy to anything else in the world, sir."

"I am not so sure of that, Ralph."

"But I am, sir."

"Well, we shall see, when you hear my story."

"Yes, sir."

"I am a member of the Army and Navy Club in San Francisco, and we are at present entertaining as a guest a lawyer of considerable fame who was once very kind to our officers when abroad.

"Last night he told me why he had come to America, and I will let you hear his story."

"Thank you, sir."

"It seems that he is attorney for a large estate in England, and the heir to it is missing.

"As there is also a title with the estate, and the next heir is anxious to step in should the direct one not be found, this lawyer has come to America in search of the heir."

"Yes, sir."

"The heir, it seems, is a youth who disappeared from England some half dozen years or more ago under strange circumstances.

"He was picked up at sea just off the coast, by a retired officer while out yachting.

"He was a baby boy and no clue could be obtained as to who he was.

"The officer adopted him, and as he grew up, those who knew who he was, and fearing that he would some day be told and claim his title and estates, sought to put him out of the way.

"There were three of them in the plot, and the boy was dared by an old coastman to go to an old haunted house.

"He went there, and the heir, in whose way he stood, and his gamekeeper, went there to do away with him.

"The boy heard them coming, and not

knowing that he had yet arrived, they talked over their plot to kill him.

"He had with him his shotgun, and as they discovered him, in self-defense he fired, killing the gamekeeper and wounding the man who most wanted him out of the way.

"The boy then fled, cut out a fishing smack, belonging to the man who had sent him into the trap, and put to sea.

"A short while since the old coaster died and confessed all, and said moreover that the boy had sent him full payment for the craft he had taken.

"The heir who had tried to rid himself of the boy committed suicide, when the old coaster also confessed that he had been paid a large sum to kidnap the boy and had placed him in the boat in which he was picked up.

"Upon this confession and testimony the attorney acted, and traced the boy about the world until he found that he was lost at sea in the barque Rainbow, wrecked on this coast.

"Now, Ralph, I know that this brave boy was not lost at sea; I know that he is now known as Ralph, the Runaway, when in reality he is Lord Ralph Redmond of Harcourt Hall, England, and that with so proud a title and vast wealth at his command he will not wish to become a midshipman in the navy of the United States."

Ralph had known from the first that Captain Edgar Yerger was telling the story of his life, and he had listened calmly unto the end.

Then he said:

"Captain Yerger, I did fire upon those men because they intended to kill me, and believing that I would be hanged I ran away.

"I am indeed happy to know that I have honorable parentage, but let me tell you that I am heart and soul an American, and though I may have to go to England to withdraw my claim to my title and the estates going with it, in favor of the next heir, I shall return to the United States and claim from you your promise of a cadetship in the navy."

"Well said, my noble fellow, but you must go to England and understand just what it is that you are throwing away."

"I will do that, sir; but does this lawyer know that I am alive?"

"Yes, for I told him to give me a short while to find you."

"Well, sir, he must wait, for I am going on a cruise."

"When?"

"You know that I have also been in the chase of Marlo the Smuggler?"

"Yes, and ran him to his doom."

"No, sir, I have a story to tell you now that will interest you."

"I shall be delighted to hear it, Ralph."

Then Dead-Shot Ralph told the story, as the reader knows it, of their going to the range, and all that followed.

He told all that he had heard from Tony about Marlo, and then continued:

"Now, Captain Yerger, I cannot divest my mind of the belief that Marlo yet lives, and the place to look for him is at the ranch where the Gold Ghouls had their retreat, for after his defeat there he will go, as he claims to own the ranch, Tony told me.

"There is a young lady there whom Tony said Marlo hoped to marry, and this must not be."

"By no means."

"Now, sir, I am determined to get fully thirty of our best people and run down the coast in the Sea Pearl, and visit that ranch by night, for it is but a few hours' march from the coast.

"I hope to find there Marlo, and capture him."

"And I pray that you may, Ralph, for that alone would get you your cadetship, and it would be a feather in your cap to enter the service for a gallant deed done," was Captain Yerger's response.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RALPH'S CRUISE.

THE next day, as the Sea Pearl was about to sail from San Francisco, Captain Yerger came on board with a grip-sack in his hand.

"I say, Ralph, I have taken leave of absence for a short while, have cast aside my uniform, and am going to ask you to take me as a passenger in the Sea Pearl, as a private individual, without a word to say in the way of interference, only to go along on your expedition.

"Don't say me nay, Ralph."

"No indeed, sir, I will be only too glad to have you along, for I am going unofficially you know, and I will be happy to have an officer along to call upon for aid if I get into a scrape."

"Only on those terms do I go then, Ralph," said Captain Yerger.

Then he added:

"I saw the English attorney last night and he told me, as I requested it, he would await my return in San Francisco, for I told him I knew that I could find the lost heir for him."

"You were very kind."

"Not at all, for I was looking to my own interest you see, in being the friend of Lord Ralph Redmond."

The Sea Pearl soon after set sail and went flying down the coast on her run to Point Desolation.

Ralph intended to stop at the Point for more men for his crew, and then to sail for Bon Secours.

The Sea Pearl made a remarkable run to Point Desolation and was welcomed as she ran in with the booming of guns, and the flying of flags and wild cheering.

The pleasure of Mrs. Kenton at finding her brother on board was shown by her greeting of him, and Pearl and the captain also bade him a cordial welcome.

Then the proposed cruise was talked over and Ralph set to work to pick his men.

The Sea Pearl, the second day after her arrival, started upon her eventful voyage, and received a grand parting salute from the people of Point Desolation.

Captain Yerger went along, as he pleasantly put it, as "master's mate."

Down the coast ran the beautiful craft, and Ralph shaped his course and time so as to run in to the coast toward sunset.

A small haven was found, after a short search, and the crew landed, all thoroughly armed.

They then began the march inland, following the trails laid down on a map which Ralph had drawn from Tony's description of the way to reach the Fuentes ranch.

It was a night march, but the moon was at its full and the way was fairly well marked.

The ranch was reached before dawn, and Dead-Shot Ralph quietly surrounded the hacienda and awaited for the coming of day.

When at sunrise Carlos looked out he was startled to that extent that he gave a yell of surprise and alarm.

El Cinto came quickly to his side and she, too, was alarmed.

But Ralph addressed under a flag of truce and Carlos met him at the gate.

"Is this the hacienda of Senor Fuentes?" he asked.

"It was the ranch of Senor Fuentes, sir, but it is now the property of Senor Marlo."

"Where is the Senor Marlo?"

"He went North a month ago, senor, on some important business."

"Did he go alone?"

"No, senor, he was accompanied by his herders, the red-skin ropers."

"How many went with him?"

"Twenty-one, senor."

"And who are here?"

"My wife, myself and five cowboys, who are now on a round-up."

"No one else?"

"None, senor."

"When do you expect the Senor Marlo home?"

"To-morrow night, senor, I heard from the Senorita Lulita Samos who passed here yesterday, for she had received a note from him by one of the red-skin ropers."

"And the herders, when will they return?"

"To-night, senor."

"Well, my man, I must hold you and your wife prisoners until after the return of the cowboys, for I want them, and to-morrow night the Senor Marlo will come into my trap."

"But, senor, what has the Senor Marlo done?"

"You may, or may not know, but you shall be well treated, and of course your wife will be."

"Now tell me how far it is to the Hacienda Samos?"

"Twenty miles, senor."

Ralph now called to Captain Yerger to approach, and the two talked together for awhile when the youth said:

"I will have you, my man, go as guide to this gentleman, and a dozen men to the Hacienda Samos, and I will remain here to await the coming of the herders to-night, and the Senor Marlo and his red ropers to-morrow night."

"You know best, senor."

This arrangement was then made, and, as Carlos furnished horses for the party, Captain Yerger and his men rode away for the Hacienda Samos, while Ralph and his detachment occupied the ranch, where El Cinto did all in her power to make them comfortable.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

MARLO left his ranch with his Indian allies, feeling that at last he had his revenge near at hand upon those whom he now hated with all the bitterness of his evil nature.

Like others who go wrong he blamed every one but himself for his evil deeds.

He loved little Pearl, child though she was, and that was the only redeeming point in his make-up.

But in spite of his love for her he was angry with her and sought to punish her, because she did not return his love.

His only way to punish her was to strike a blow at others.

He hated Ralph with all the venom in his heart.

Marlo hated Captain Karl because he had taken the part of Ralph against him, as had Mrs. Kenton also.

He hated the coasters, his own people, because they had turned against him when he became a smuggler.

Now, with his Indian allies he had the means of revenge once more within his grasp, and so he decided to strike his severest blow.

He would capture Ralph, slay the Coaster Chief and carry off Pearl, leaving Mrs. Kenton to mourn the loss of her husband and daughter.

Ralph should be put to death in the end, by means that he would invent to show his greatest hatred of him.

Such was the plan of the revengful traitor Marlo, as he rode on his way up to the mountain range.

It was days before he arrived at a secret camp within a short distance of the home of the Coaster Chief, which would be the first to receive the blow.

It was a dark night when he at last decided to strike, and he moved out of his retreat with his red-skin ropers, the chief Red Raven by his side.

They crept up the mountain stealthily, and surrounded the Coaster Chief's cabin.

There was no alarm given by barking dog, and it seemed that there was no one to warn the inmates of the cabin of their danger.

He saw then that the cabin was locked, by padlock and chain on the outside, and this showed that the inmates had gone.

Indications showed that it had not been recently occupied, and Marlo said:

"But we will run off the cattle into the Indian country."

But the cattle were not to be found, for the coasters had driven them nearer to Point Desolation.

All the houses were deserted on the range, and so Marlo was content to let them alone.

"They will come back in good time, and then we can strike our blow, for I will never give it up."

"Now we must hit the ranches to the southward, and hang upon the stage trails to repay us for what we have lost here."

Feeling, however, that the soldiers would soon be upon his track, and that he must go off and hide for a season, Marlo started upon his return to the haunted hacienda, where he knew that he could conceal his Indian allies until they were again needed for their red work against the pale-faces.

Deeply disappointed as he was, Marlo felt that he was only postponing his blow of vengeance against his people.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARLO'S GIFT.

SEATED upon the piazza of her home one pleasant afternoon, reading aloud to her father, who was reclining in a hammock, Senorita Samos looked up from her book to discover a horseman approaching the hacienda.

"Father, some one is coming, and as well as I can discern it is an Indian," she said.

Senor Samos arose from his hammock, got his spy-glass and turned it upon the horseman.

"Yes, it is an Indian, so doubtless one of the haunted hacienda herders that went off as a guard for Senor Marlo in his Northern trip."

The father and daughter watched the coming red-skin with interest.

He was admitted into the grounds and riding up to the hacienda dismounted, ascended the steps and said:

"Talking paper for the white maiden."

"Ah! a letter for me?"

"Yes."

"You are one of the Senor Marlo's herders?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Talking paper tell."

He handed over a note as he spoke."

It was written on a couple of pages of a notebook and with lead-pencil, being sent without envelope.

Lulita took the note and read aloud as follows:

"IN CAMP, SUNDAY.

"MY DEAR SENORITA:—

"I send this message to you, asking if you will not, in one of your long rides, pass near, or send a message, to my home to notify my chief herder, Carlos, of my coming, so that all may be prepared for me."

"I have been East on a business trip. It was a most successful one, permit me to say; but I left my red-men in camp to await my return."

"The Indian messenger who will hand you this will head me off on the northern trail, and I will be more than happy if you will vouchsafe a few words in reply to him."

"When I have rested after my long and arduous trip, I will take the greatest pleasure in a visit to Hacienda Samos, where I have been made so welcome."

"While East I took the liberty of purchasing for you a trinket which I beg your acceptance of before my return, and send by the bearer."

"It is but a slight token of my esteem for you."

"With my kindest remembrances to your good father, believe me, my dear senorita,
Your devoted friend,
"MARLOWE."

Such was the letter, and when Lulita had read it there was a bright flush upon her face.

The Indian now handed over the "trinket," with the look of one who would like to keep it.

"Oh! how beautiful!" cried Lulita.

"That man loves you."

"Oh, father!"

"I do not blame him, my child, for who could help it, who knows you?"

Lulita was silent and seemed not to know what to say.

"What should be my answer, my child, should he ask me for my daughter's hand?"

"Father, I do not love Senor Marlowe, as I know that I am capable of loving. Let me see more of him than I have and perhaps I may."

"And now about this bracelet?"

"Shall I accept it, father?"

"Keep it until his return," was her father's answer.

Then Lulita went off and wrote an answer to the note, and a couple of hours after the red-skin messenger started upon his return to join his chief on his trail homeward.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE HOME TRAIL.

THE five herders of the haunted ranch returned from their rounding up the cattle to discover that they were in a trap.

Ralph had laid his plans well, and the herders were captured without a struggle.

Carlos had vouched for them that they were innocent of any crime, that he had lately received them from the herders' camp many miles away, and that they knew nothing of Senor Marlo or what he was, only supposing what he was what he professed to be, an honest ranchero.

The men were frightened, however, at finding themselves in durance vile, and supposed that they would be punished whether guilty or not.

They offered no resistance, and were secured in a room of the hacienda to await the coming of the master.

Within the hacienda Ralph had stationed his men at posts to command the Indians when they should ride in.

Carlos having gone with Captain Yerge to the Hacienda Samos, El Cinto was told to be ready to open the gates at the coming of Marlo and his red-skin ropers, and thus let them enter the grounds, when she should close the gates behind them, while the sailors in the porter's lodge at the side of the gateway, should prevent their rushing out again.

Within the rooms of both wings, and in the ruins, as well as in the foliage of the garden upon the open side of the Plaza, the Coasters were stationed, so that the incoming party would be held under fire in every direction.

So the men in the lodge stood ready to open the gate, one of them being dressed as a cowboy and told to reply in broken English that he was one of the newly employed cowboys and Senor Carlo was absent from the hacienda.

Ralph also took up his position in the lodge, the best position for him to demand the surrender from, and to face Marlo if it came to a combat between them.

In the mean while Marlo and his Indian ropers were on their way back to the haunted hacienda.

The messenger sent to the Senorita Lulita met the returning party upon the trail, just as they were going into camp, and Marlo eagerly greeted him.

"Well, Red Raven, did you reach the Hacienda Samos?"

"Yes, Senor Chief."

"You did well, and I will make you a handsome present when we return to the hacienda, for your going."

"The chief is good to the Red Raven."

"You saw the Senorita Lulita?"

"Yes."

"And her father?"

"Yes."

"And gave my letter?"

"Yes."

"What did she say?"

"She looked glad."

"And you gave her the bracelet?"

"Yes."

"And did she look glad?"

"Heap glad, and so did senor."

"Ah! and sent me a letter?"

"Here talking-paper."

Marlo took the note handed him by the Indian.

It looked the worse for wear, as though the Red Raven had not been very particular about it.

In fact, had it been brought by a white messenger, Marlo would have had a suspicion that it had been opened and read.

Now, however, he said:

"I only hope that my note was not as badly soiled and crumpled as this."

Opening the envelope, which, with the paper, was scented, he read the letter.

"Cool, yet warm," muttered Marlo upon reading the brief epistle, "for I can read between the lines."

"Yes, I will win her," and placing the missive in his pocket, he had in it food for thought.

The next day he pressed on to reach the haunted hacienda that night as soon after darkness set in as possible.

He little dreamed who awaited him there!

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CLEVER CAPTURE.

At last the hacienda came in sight, and Marlo began to congratulate himself upon his return to the home he had so strangely come into possession of, though he could not but have a feeling of dread that again he might be haunted by the ghost of Marco Fuentes.

In spite of his Indian guard, he gazed somewhat anxiously about him as he drew near the hacienda, lest the vision of the dead outlaw Ranchero Fuentes should confront him.

"Well, Red Raven, here we are," he said, as they drew near to the gateway.

"Yes."

"Now we can rest."

"Yes."

"I will give you and your braves a place to sleep in the room next to mine," said Marlo, thinking of the ghost.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Red-men no sleep under roof. Sleep near chief, but not in hacienda."

"Ah! the nights are too warm for you?"

"Yes."

"I believe you are right, and I guess I'll camp out in the grounds with you also, to-night."

"All right."

Disappointed in getting company in the hacienda, to keep off the ghost of the ranchero he had sent to his death, Marlo was not long in deciding that he would spend the first night in the grounds.

If Fuentes did not haunt him there, the next night he would occupy his rooms.

As he was now quite near to the gateway he raised his voice and hailed:

"Ho, Carlos! Carlos!"

No answer came and again he called.

But on he rode and reaching the gateway he called again and again.

At last an answering call came, and soon after a man passed across the Plaza as though just aroused from sleep.

"Ho, Carlos, you sleep sound," said Marlo as the man opened the gate.

"It is not Carlos, senor."

"Ah! who are you?"

"One of the new men, senor, who is staying at the hacienda while Carlos is away."

"Carlos not here?"

"No, senor; he has gone to the Hacienda Samos, senor."

"Why has he gone there?"

"To ask the senorita about you, senor, for the messenger could not make himself understood."

"Ah, yes, I understand now, for I told the senorita in my note to send word over here of coming."

"Well, my man, arouse El Cinto, for we are all hungry and want supper. I am sorry we were not expected."

He had ridden into the Plaza meanwhile, and the red-skin ropers had filed to the left by him, to go into camp in the grounds.

But at his words, the gate had been closed behind him by the man who had opened it, and the large iron key was withdrawn and thrust into his pocket.

Then came the words of Marlo, and an unlooked for reply:

"I am sorry we were not expected."

"But you were expected, Marlo the Smuggler and outlaw."

The words fell upon the ears of the outlaw ranchero in a voice that sent every drop of blood from his face to his heart.

In moments of surprise and danger a man thinks with lightning rapidity, and Marlo's first thought was that the ghost of Fuentes was behind him.

He wheeled quickly in his saddle, his hands hardly capable of reining in his horse, when he beheld standing behind him a youth in sailor garb, a revolver leveled at his heart.

The moon shone with silvery light full upon the scene, and Marlo also beheld men coming out of the lodge with rifles leveled.

In dismay, his eyes turned quickly over the Plaza and still other forms were seen.

Before he could utter a word in reply, he heard the command:

"Hands up, Smuggler, or die!"

Into the flanks of his horse he sunk his spurs, terrified at what he saw, and to dash toward the gate again to break through, when, as he wheeled, there came a whizzing sound in the air and a lariat whirled over his head, the noose encircling him, and he was dragged heavily from his saddle, and with force enough to stun him for an instant or two.

The one who had thrown the lariat was none other than Red Raven, who had suddenly discovered that the ranch was occupied by armed men, and fearful that Marlo would escape, for he knew not that the gate was locked, he suddenly threw his lasso and captured him, while he at the same time threw his hands above his head and cried:

"Don't fire upon me, senors, or my men, for we surrender!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RED RAVEN UNMASKED.

THE red-skin ropers had wheeled their horses quickly, at the sound of loud voices in their rear, and when they saw their chief alone, as it were, with strange men about him, back they had come at a rush, but the sailors did not fire upon them, simply closing in upon them from all sides, and hemming them in near the gate.

A single shot would have precipitated a desperate combat in an instant, for the red-skin ropers would have fought to the death, had their chief, the Red Raven, so ordered.

But, instead, they heard his warning cry not to resist, and saw that he had unhorsed with his lariat the one whom they had looked upon as their pale-faced captain.

The words of the Red Raven and his attitude showed his braves that he intended to yield without a struggle, and following his command they at once halted near him and raised their hands above their heads in token of submission.

The Red Raven, when he had uttered the words that followed the fall of Marlo, had not spoken like an Indian; his voice had been clear as a trumpet, his English perfect.

Now, when every eye was upon him, he threw himself from his horse and quickly ran to the fallen ranchero.

In an instant he had disarmed him, and then turning to Ralph and his men, for the sailors now formed a semicircle around the red ropers, crowding them upon the gate, he said, again speaking in perfect English:

"Senor, you came here to capture this man, Marlo, the ranchero?"

"Yes, senor."

"Well, there he is. He is your prisoner."

"And you, who are you?" asked Ralph, in surprise.

"I am known as Red Raven, the chief of the red-skin ropers. These men about me are Indians, but I am not."

"You are a white man?"

"I am, and I will tell you who I am and how that man has wronged me."

"This man came to my house as a pretended priest, and he it was who sent me from here to be hanged by the cowboys of the Samos Hacienda."

"A bribe saved me from death, and I then went to my old friends, the Indians, and organized this band of young braves to return and aid me in my revenge."

"I came back as their chief, and not even my foe, here, ever suspected me of being other than I represented myself."

"Being here with him, I was able to play ghost, and I have haunted him until he has cringed in terror, for thinking that I was dead, that he had sent me to the grave, he was in mortal fear of what he believed was my spirit."

"I went with him on his Northern trail to be near him, to watch him."

"I came back here to haunt him each night in my home and drive him mad or force him to take his own life in abject fear of living."

"He took the red-skin ropers far North to attack his own people, the Coasters, but they were no longer dwelling in the range."

"As he is now in your power, your prisoner, I am content, and shall leave him in your keeping, well knowing that I will be thoroughly avenged."

"Now, senor, this is my home, for let me introduce myself as Marco Fuentes, the ranchero of this hacienda, and to tell you that you are more than welcome in my house."

"Now that my revenge is attained, there is no longer any need of my playing the Indian, so I will change my costume and be ready soon to welcome you in my proper person as Senor Fuentes."

"I will not detain you long."

With this the Senor Fuentes disappeared within the hacienda.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GIVEN THE SLIP.

SENOR FUENTES had been gone all of half an hour before the outlaw chief Marlo appeared to collect his scattered senses so as to speak.

He had heard in a confused sort of way all that had taken place, and after Fuentes had disappeared, Ralph set to work to restore his

prisoner to his senses, fearing that he had been badly hurt.

But when, at last, Marlo did come round, he saw that he was bound hands and feet, and he fully understood the situation, for he had grasped what Fuentes had said, and now it came upon him in its full meaning.

Suddenly realizing that Fuentes had gone he cried:

"Yes, I am Marlo the Smuggler."

"That I do not deny, but where is that man, the outlaw ranchero, Marco Fuentes?"

"He will soon return," said Dead-Shot Ralph.

"Never! he has gone, he has fled from here by one of the secret passages leading from this old ruin."

"If I am Marlo the Smuggler, he is Fuentes the outlaw, the chief of the Gold Ghouls, and though you have captured me, though you have me safe enough, you have allowed a man to escape who is as vile as I am."

"After him all of you, for your work is not half done in capturing me."

When the Coasters recalled that Fuentes had indeed escaped they sought to capture him.

But in vain.

They realized that he was indeed an outlaw, the chief of the Gold Ghouls, and they were most anxious indeed to capture him.

But there could be found no trace of the ranchero, and El Cinto said that, though she did not know of the secret avenues of escape from the old hacienda, she was aware that there were such, and Fuentes had thus made his way to safety.

As Fuentes could not be found, Ralph was forced to give up the hunt, and so told El Cinto that he would leave her in charge of the hacienda once more, she and her husband, who would be sent back from Hacienda Samos, when they should go there, for the young sailor was to go that way back to the coast, while the Coasters went on direct to the vessel with their prisoner.

Mounted on horses taken from the ranch, Ralph and a small guard went to Hacienda Samos where Captain Yerger had arrived and told the story of Marlo's treachery and crimes, to the horror of Senor Samos and Lulita, and the latter had every reason to feel happy over her escape from an alliance with a man so vile as the Cowboy Smuggler and traitor.

Returning to the coast, Captain Yerger and Ralph found the rest of the party there with their prisoner, and getting up sail the Sea Pearl stood out of the little basin, homeward bound after her successful cruise in capturing the traitor Coaster who had so justly won the name of Marlo the Merciless.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the Sea Pearl arrived at Point Desolation, Marlo was taken at once to the prison of the settlement, and where, to the credit of the Coasters be it said, few of their number ever were placed.

By the laws of this strange community, a traitor had to be punished in their own peculiar way; so Marlo was tried by night, before a secret and unknown tribunal, who sentenced him to a fate of which the people were kept in profound ignorance.

The day following, Captain Yerger returned to San Francisco, with Ralph, in the Sea Pearl.

Upon arriving there the youth was taken to the hotel and brought face to face with the English attorney of whom the captain had spoken as coming to America in search of the lost heir to the title and estates of Harcourt Hall.

It did not take the lawyer very long to discover in Ralph the one he sought, and he

proposed returning at once with the youth to England.

"Oh no, sir!" said Dead-Shot Ralph.

"You have found me now, and I promise you I will not lose myself again; but you will have to go back alone, as I have duties to perform here which I cannot neglect."

"Within a year, however, I will return, and then we can arrange matters, for I wish you to look up the heir who follows me in the title as I am an American now, and Captain Yerger intends to get me a midshipman's berth in the United States Navy."

"And would you yield a noble title and vast fortune to become a midshipman in the navy of the United States?" asked the attorney in surprise.

"I do not care for any title, sir, except one I can win by my own deeds. Nor am I poor, and perhaps I can add to what I have."

"But I will return to England, sir, and clear my name of the stain upon it, and settle matters so that there will be no trouble about another heir."

With this the English attorney had to be satisfied.

Captain Yerger at once began to lay his plans to secure a cadetship at the Naval Academy for Ralph, and in this the youth's gallant career was a great aid of his doing so.

Eventually he got the appointment, and going to England, as he had promised the attorney, he kept to his determination to give up all, and yet found that the old officer who had adopted him, after finding him in an open boat at sea, had also made him his heir.

This property, which was considerable, Ralph accepted—the officer having no near kindred;—and after resigning all claim to his own title and estates, he returned to the United States. Then, after a visit to the Carletons, who had gone to live in an elegant home in San Francisco, he entered the Navy of the United States in which he now holds a commission, and where he is honored by all who know him.

Captain Yerger was so pleased with Lulita Samos that he visited her again and again and eventually she became his wife.

That Ralph Redmond and Pearl were married, when he graduated at the Naval Academy, of course the reader knows, for how could it be otherwise?

THE END.

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